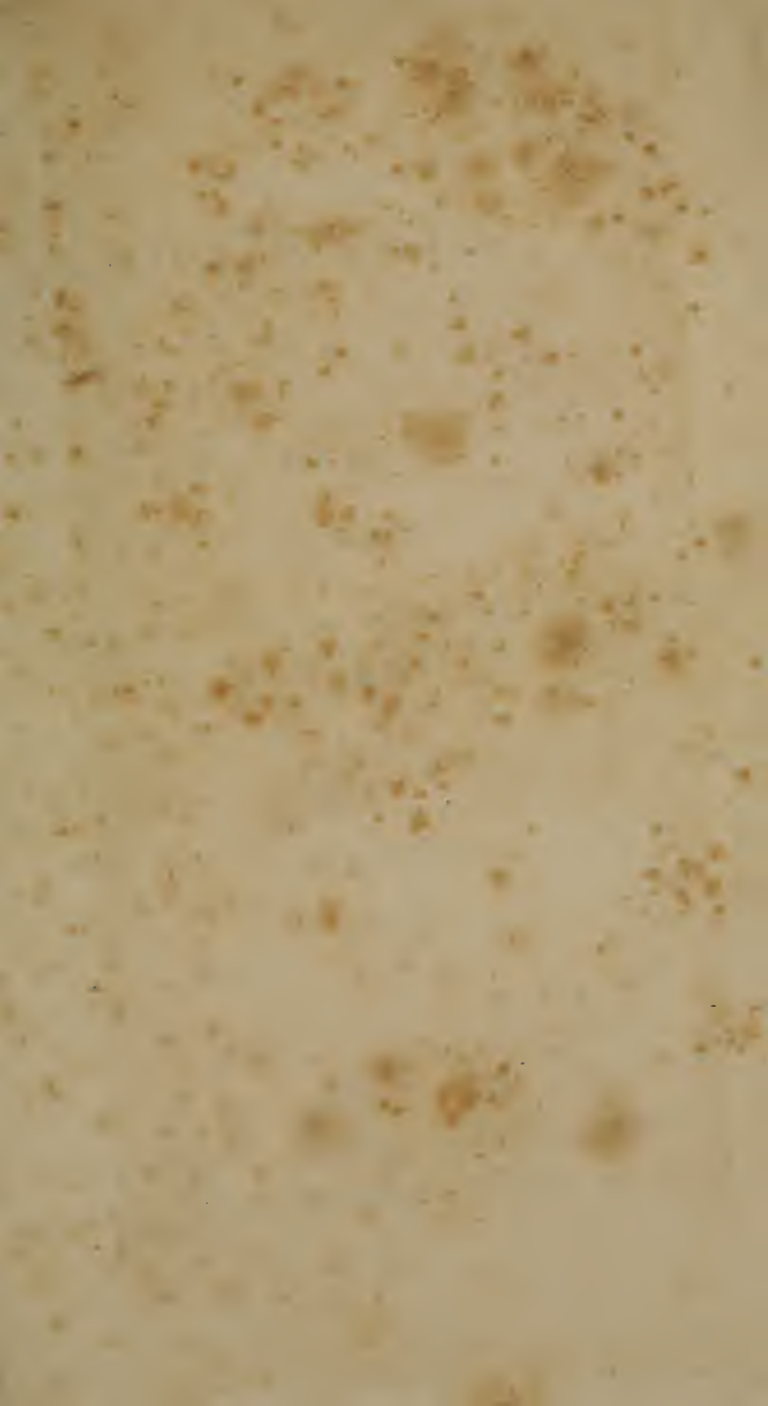






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OUR COUNTY.

BY

JOHN MILLS, ESQ.

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"THE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN;" "THE STAGE COACH, OR THE
ROAD OF LIFE;" "CHRISTMAS IN THE OLDEN TIME;"

"THE LIFE OF A FOXHOUND," &C., &C.

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL. III.

LONDON :

HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,

GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1850.

LONDON:
MYERS AND CO., PRINTERS, 37, KING STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

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CHAPTER I.

Revised 17 Aug 50

“What’s yet in this
That bears the name of life? Yet in this life
Lie hid more thousand deaths : yet death we fear,
That makes these odds all even.”

IN the moss-grown tower of the church, raising its head above the thick foliage of surrounding trees, a bell swung in measured and mournful sounds. Now swelling on the wind, and then sighing away in the distance, the sad knell was carried from house to house, and struck as coldly as its iron tongue on many a grieving heart.

Not a voice was heard of children on the green at play; no gossip crooned the snatch of an old ballad at the cottage door, and even the anvil at the smithy no longer clinked upon the ear. The village was wrapped in gloom and silence.

In knots about the lych-gate, small groups assembled at an early hour of the day, and earnest as their conversation appeared to be, all spoke in a low and gentle tone. With both hands clasped upon a crutch-stick, an old woman stood in the middle of a throng, and as the tears coursed each other down her lined and pallid cheeks, thus gave vent to the utterance of her woe.

“So young, and yet to die! ’Tis a sorry day, neighbours, a sorry day, to each and all. We have heard her pretty voice speak of comfort to the afflicted, and hope to the sorrowful; but the lips are mute now. We shall never hear them speak again. Her hand, too, was always open to the poor,

and, like her lady mother, the needy had but to tell their wants, to be relieved. Aye," continued the speaker, slightly striking the ground with her stick, "not with harsh words and a niggard's dole; for her gifts were such as only angels give. But she is taken from us now. The daisy will soon blossom upon her grave, neighbours, and yet in our hearts she will live—in the hearts which her goodness and charity comforted. So young, and yet to die!" again ejaculated the mourner, shaking her aged head. "From those she loved, and from those who loved her, she has gone. The parting's taken, and if we meet again, it must be in heaven. And there, as on earth, may her prayers be joined with ours."

"May God so will it in his goodness," fervently responded a voice.

It was not a damp, cold vault, on which the sun could never shine, that Rose Warren had chosen for her last resting-place;

that small spot in which dust was to turn to dust. Under the arched boughs of a weeping ash, planted by her own frail hands in childhood, was the earth now turned to receive its tenant. Within a few feet a thick hawthorn cast a sombre shade, and here the nightingale trilled her sweetest notes, and sung throughout the early summer night. The first and freshest flowers of the spring, wild daffodils, violets, and primroses, decked the ground beneath, and the last rays of the parting day always lingered, as if in fondness, there.

The sexton was a man well stricken in years, and from his own reckoning, and that of his spade, for it was worn both bright and sharp, had dug the graves of generations. So often had his tools clicked among the pebbles of the churchyard, that with him the opening of a grave was merely a question of width and depth. He was not hard-hearted either, nor callous to the cares and sorrows of his friends and neighbours,

although he generally whistled at his work, and paid but little regard to the remnants of mortality which his shovel occasionally brought to the surface. To day, however, the sexton delved in silence. He could not but bear in mind that the loss for which so many grieved, he had shared. The Christmas never came, but he was among the first to receive Rose Warren's bounty, and when ill and bed-ridden, and he began to think that his last account, too, was about being balanced by a grave, she sought his lonely chamber, and soothed his pain by words which told of happiness and hope hereafter, and sunk deeply in his memory.

The gathering throng thickened, and as the time wore on, all eyes were turned to the narrow and winding avenue which formed the by-path leading from the churchyard to the Grange. A few, but they were children, stood by the side of the grave, silently watching the sexton at his work,

and as the last spadefull was thrown to the brink, and he quitted his task, they held each other fast, so as to peep in safety to the depth.

In the long train of mourners following that black and sweeping pall, which now appeared, slowly borne with a measured step, not one mocked the dead. There was no hireling there, tricked in sable, no mummery of woe; no nodding plumes, and outward vanity and pomp. Gently and tenderly they carried her, and their grief was only shewn in the simplest language of their hearts.

Enveloped in the thick folds of a capacious veil, which fell from her head almost to her feet, Lady Warren walked with an unsteady gait next the coffin; then closely followed her son, supporting the weeping Maud, and after them a retinue of tenants to the family, old domestics, and humbler dependants. The venerable clergyman—of whom truthfully might it be said,

“ At church with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorn'd the venerable place :
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.
The service past, around the pious man,
With steady zeal each honest rustic ran,
Even children follow'd with endearing wile,
And pluck'd his gown to share the good man's smile:
His ready smile a parent's warmth express'd,
Their welfare pleas'd him, and their cares distress'd
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven”—

met the mournful procession at the gate,
and began the beautiful ritual for the dead.

“ I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

“ I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: when I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.

“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Gently and tenderly they carried her, and their grief was only shewn in the simplest language of their hearts.

CHAPTER II.

“’Tis gold
Which buys admittance—”

ILL at ease as he felt, Jack Racket endeavoured to assume a confidence, as he sat alone in Mister Sharp's drawing room, drumming a finger and thumb upon the crown of his hat, and whistling, in a subdued tone, the lively air of “We won't go home till morning.” It required no very deep penetration, however, to see that the effort was one of no ordinary kind. The twitching of his features, the restlessness of his limbs, and the total absence of that swagger, which

generally accompanied all his movements, shewed there was an anxiety within, far from according with his usual indifference and self-possession.

“Wish the event was over,” said he, stretching his legs over the backs of a couple of chairs. “Can’t bear this handicap. Feel as if I was over-weighted and had a dead crusher on me. Why couldn’t ’Torney make the match and bring it off all his own way? As to telling the guv’nor, I might go in and win if I could, it’s what I call silly; right down weak. Of course,” continued Jack, making a pull at his collars and settling the tie of a cravat which partook of all the shades of the rainbow, “I shall win in the long run. Always did and always shall; but upon my soul, up to this time o’ day, I’ve been continually a-knocking at the door without gettin’ in! It’s no use denying to myself that fact, whatever I might do to others. Here I am,” said he, glancing at his speckless white cords and top boots with

the deepest admiration, "got up at no end of expense, in the bloom of condition, doing strong work, sound as an acorn, and fit as a fiddle, and yet I'm far from being a favourite. It's amazin' odd!"

So marvellous appeared this reflection, that some seconds passed before Jack resumed his discourse to himself.

"Must come up in the market though, soon," continued he. "It can't be otherwise. Young Flatman's on the point of meeting with a quiet kick out, neck-an'-crop, and then when the course *is* clear, I shall take him fast by the head, give him a shake, and go in and win in a canter. The filly takes a strong lead just now; but she'll never climb the hill without my gettin' to her head."

The door opened, and the farther progress of Jack's soliloquy was broken off by the appearance of Maud, dressed in the deepest mourning. Her face was as pale and bloodless as the whitest wax; but no sooner did her eyes fall on the out-stretched form of

her visitor, than a crimson flush mounted to her temples, and her eyes flashed with sudden indignation.

"You'll excuse me, Miss," said Jack, springing from his seat, and knocking over both the chairs on which his feet rested. "You'll excuse me, Miss," repeated he, scrambling them on their legs again, and coming forward, in a gait between a skip and a jump; "but at home wherever I go, ye see. Nothing like the free-an-easy style, Miss."

Maud bowed slightly, but made no reply.

"Well!" exclaimed he, offering a particularly red and thick hand, the fingers of which appeared like a group of over-grown thumbs; "and how *are* ye?"

Maud coldly thanked him; but did not, so far as could be judged from any outward or visible sign, see the group of over-grown thumbs.

Jack felt as if he had been tripped up on ice and took the seat nearest at hand, in a most crest-fallen and meek condition.

There was an awful pause, so awful that it became insupportable to Jack, and he determined to break the silence, at all risks, for nothing could be worse than that.

"How's 'Torney?" said he, crossing his legs with a fling, in the strong endeavour to regain some of his evaporated assurance.

Maud believed her father was quite well; but she had not seen him that morning.

"Oh!" returned Jack, "not seen him, eh? My eyes have been refreshed with a view of him at a distance, on his road to the guv'nor. Between ourselves, Miss," said he, lowering his voice, "the guv'nor's all but run to a standstill. It's nearly old Dicky with him. One can't exactly say when he'll be bowled out, for matches of this kind, against time, are always uncertain; but there's this precious consolation,—when his wicket *is* down, *I* come in for the stumpy."

A slight shudder ran through Maud's veins; but she said nothing, and kept her

eyes fixed on the carpet at her foot. Thinking that he was producing a desirable impression, Jack's courage began to mount again, and he continued, in a tone of improved confidence :

“ 'Torney knows what a heap I shall touch, when it comes to my turn, and it 's natural for him to wish, as a father——”

Maud raised her eyes, and bending a steady, inquiring gaze upon the speaker, he found himself suddenly seized with a fit of the stammers.

“ To wish as—as—as a father,” repeated Jack; “ parents are close-fisted chaps, Miss; to—to—to see a gent with lots of pewter enter himself for the trial stakes.”

There was still the same quiet look which disconcerted Jack far more than any words could have done.

“ I don't wish to be unpleasant,” continued he; “ far from it, Miss, I'm too fond of fee-males in a general way to make myself disagreeable to even the old, tough,

or ugly—not mentioning what my feelings are towards the pretty little dolls of gals one sometimes comes across. At the same time, Miss, it becomes necessary—I may say particularly indispensable—that you and I should come to a perfect understanding, without any more shilly-shallying.”

“Understanding?” repeated Maud, while her bosom heaved convulsively as she spoke.

“On the square,” said he, “is what I mean. Clear, straight for’ard articles, with umpire and bottle holders, stakes made good, time and place fixed. That’s your time o’ day. Chink-wink ’em along!”

Jack had now overcome the momentary bashfulness which afflicted him, and he felt himself equal to the accomplishment of the task, which he could scarcely screw his courage to commence.

“Honesty is the best policy, I’ve heard,” said Jack, “and so it may be when right down robbery isn’t a great deal better. But in this instance, Miss, I’ll be honest

enough to tell ye, that I've not paid you the little delicate attentions of late without expecting a return for the payment. It's true, I haven't had a button's worth, and that's the reason I'm now uncorking my sentiments."

"I must beg, sir," replied Maud, with dignity, "that you will relieve me of your presence."

"Gently there, gently," returned Jack. "Don't go clean over the traces at the first shy. Here am I, as soft as silk, and yet there *you* are cutting up rougher than ever. Never saw such a difficult one to bit, in my life before! You'll neither go with snaffle, curb, nor clipper."

"Your language, sir," rejoined Maud, "is as offensive as its purpose."

"There you are again," whined Jack. "Can't open my mouth without putting my foot in it. Now *do* hear what I've got to say," continued he. "If I was a murderer and you were sitting in judgment upon me,

you'd do that; so it isn't any very great favour after all."

Maud made no answer; but the quick and loud breathing proclaimed the restraint which she had placed upon her feelings.

"'Torney, you see," said Jack, finding that his object was so far attained that he was listened to, "and my guv'nor have set their minds upon our putting our osses together. They're two deep old files, and having made everything snug and comfortable between *themselves*, want us to follow suit. Now *they*'ve got the means—the rhino—and *we* haven't, which makes a particular difference in the scale of events. But if we can come to a nice little arrangement between *ourselves* to couple, the badger-pied old chaps have agreed to bring down the stumpy handsome."

"Have you my father's consent to make this proposal?" asked Maud, in trembling accents.

"Quite so," replied Jack, quickly, "quite

so. He and the guv'nor compared books, and it was settled, snug and comfortable, that putting their winnings together, by joining their offspring in holy matrimony, would be just the ticket."

"And when was this arrangement," said Maud, in the same faltering tone, "entered into?"

"Just before the Warwick Spring Meeting," rejoined he, "where I dropped a considerable round sum on the Pet of the Petticoats—a nice nag, but couldn't last the distance."

"May I ask in what terms my father's approval was couched?" inquired Maud.

"Oh! certainly," returned Jack; "nothing can be fairer. 'Torney seemed to flinch a little the first two or three times I spoke to him on the matter; but when the guv'nor said what he *could* do, and what he *would* do, provided the little event was brought off on the square, he headed short back on his line, and took a very different view of the

country. Says 'Torney—in his sleek, nice, oily way—' I'll not interfere in *forcing* this marriage upon my daughter. She is of an age now to be capable of judging for herself, and her inclination must be studied, as well as her interests. At all proper times and seasons, sir,' said he, making me as low a bow as if I was a dook, 'you'll find opportunities of seeing my daughter and making such favourable impressions as your skill in gallantry may dictate.' "

"And these were his words?" ejaculated Maud, with a deeply drawn sigh.

"His own particular words, Miss," said Jack, who now feeling himself getting on, resolved to make a perfect finish. "The gov'nor didn't like this sort of wasting time, as he called it, and wanted 'Torney to polish the business off at once; but he wouldn't be turned in this respect, and that's the cause I've been here almost daily—for I don't know how long—with my little winning ways," and Jack concluded his

remark with one of his most effective winks.

"'Tis hardly credible!" exclaimed Maud, drawing a hand across her brow as if bewildered at what she heard; "but I suppose my senses do not deceive me."

"Deceive ye!" cried Jack, misconstruing her meaning. "No, no, don't be afraid o' that. I've deceived many a one in my time; but blister me, if ever I try that game on with you, Miss! I'll marry *you*—tie myself right up short by the head whenever you like, and the sooner the better."

Whether to go or stay Maud scarcely knew. To listen to such ribald language made her blood run coldly through her veins, and yet there was an irresistible temptation to remain and hear the entire plan and plot, by which she was to be sacrificed to the meanest and basest cupidity.

"We all knew of course," resumed Jack, "there was that little bit of rum-ti-tum-with-the-froth-off with young Ned Warren.

But Lor' bless your beauty! you might as well think of mating with a parish pauper. He's done—brown'd—pigeon'd—pluck'd—hasn't a feather to fly with."

"And how has the gentleman you speak of been brought to this pitiable condition?" inquired Maud.

"Oh!" replied Jack, "through his own unfledged innocence and unsuspecting simplicity. He always would meddle with tools he knew nothing about, and the consequence is, he's cut his precious fingers. The family of Flatman," continued Jack, with a knowing wink, "is a pretty extensive one. Go where you will, you're sure to pick up a member or two, and to see how that family supplies the wants of another called Sharp, is better than any eye-water for blindness."

"Your father—"

"Has had pretty pickings no doubt," interrupted Jack, "as well as 'Torney, and if they hadn't had 'em, somebody else would. That's the way they justify the measures,

and a right way, too. It won't be long before one or other will be in possession of the Grange, and if you like to be its Missis, say but the word and there you shall be, as grand a lady as any in all our county. There's an offer," hallooed he, striking his boots with his whip. "That's your what's o'clock! Chink-wink 'em along!"

"I cannot remain to hear more," said Maud, rising hastily and placing her handkerchief to her eyes. "I cannot remain to hear more."

"Stay, stay," replied Jack. "Don't come the soft. To fee-males these sort of things are affectin' no doubt; but having made such good running from the start, let me land myself a winner in the same handsome style, if it's only by a head. I didn't think it *paw*-sible for me to lead away in this manner; but we shall have no more dilly-dallying, swerving, craning, and flinching. We're beginning to understand each other, I see."

"You are too explicit, sir," rejoined

Maud, "for there to be the slightest misunderstanding between us."

"Just what I meant," said Jack, "only didn't exactly know how to set about it. Done the trick at last, though, and no mistake. Told the gov'nor I should."

At this juncture approaching footsteps were heard, and soon afterwards Maud's father entered the room. For an instant he seemed startled and confused, at seeing in whose presence he found himself; but he quickly recovered his self-possession, and the effect, perhaps, was not noticed—at least he hoped so.

"Ah, 'Torney!" hallooed Jack; "just in time to spoil the puddin'. Old folks, Miss," continued he, turning to Maud, "*will* drop in at the identical moment they're not wanted. It's a way they've got, and a devilish inconvenient one it is. No matter. Got my foot in the stirrup at last, 'Torney," continued he, giving the lawyer a friendly slap between the shoulders; "give me joy,

old cockalorum. You 'll have a slap-up, tip-top, out-an'-out son-in-law, and no mistake. And as for stock, there won't be such blood, bone, and substance, to be found. It's a racehorse to a hayseed, 'Torney,—a racehorse to a hayseed, I tell ye. That 's your what 's-o'-clock! Chink-wink 'em along!"

The lawyer stared in mute astonishment. The volubility of Jack Racket appeared to strike him dumb; and he glanced from one to the other, with a dull, leaden look, as if his brain reeled.

"I told ye," resumed Jack again, slapping the lawyer between the shoulders, "that the last at the start might be the first past the chair. Ha, ha, ha, 'Torney! It takes me, you see, to take the shine out o' the family blacking. There 's nothing like pluck. Pluck will pull through, when weight 's beaten to a standstill. I 'm pluck, I am—damn me! You 'll never find me with a shaking tail, and my head between my knees. I 'm the r-r-right sort—the reg'lar

tip. That 's your time o' day. Chink-wink 'em along! "

Mister Sharp remained rooted to the spot where he stood; and, although his lips moved, as if in speech, not a sentence fell from them.

" Won't stay any longer," said Jack, seizing his hat. " Good-bye, deary. Keep your head cool, your feet warm, and your mind towards heaven. Capital rule,—eh, 'Torney? Beats Newmarket hollow. That's your what's-o'-clock. Chink-wink 'em along! " And, without further ceremony of any kind, he took an abrupt departure.

Scarcely was his footfall out of hearing, than Maud, after two or three ineffectual attempts to speak, said, in a strangely altered tone, " May I ask, father, whether that—that person, who has just left, had your *consent* to address me as a suitor? "

" I certainly told him he might do so," replied he; " common justice demands that I should make this unqualified admission."

“Then I have not another word to say,” rejoined Maud ; and thus speaking, she swept quickly from the room ; but before the door closed, a choking sob broke upon his ear

CHAPTER III.

“ How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds,
Makes deeds ill done ? ”

THE cage was there, in the same corner, and on the same nail; but the patriarchal lark had long been called to the home of his fathers. At least, the cage was empty, whilom tenanted by Tom Piper's songster—albeit, a mute one for many a season—and his jealous rival the sleek, obese, and dozy cat was left in sole possession of the undivided affections of his master. And never did that blinking, winking, dreaming animal

look more at ease, than when now stretched before the fire, he monopolized the centre of the rug and appeared, by a boldness of manner, to defy any encroachment upon his position. The presence of Tom Piper, Frank Martin, and Simon Slip, was totally lost upon Tabby Tom, and he turned his broad back to the company without the smallest compunction or conscientious scruples.

The meeting, however, seemed anything but a merry one, and notwithstanding Toby Philpot stood in the centre of the table, crowned with a diadem of snowy whiteness, and laughing as broadly as ever at his antiquated joke, he threw no warmth or hilarity around.

“Come,” said Tom Piper, with a strong effort to rally his spirits, and pushing Toby Philpot across the table, “don’t let the ale get as stale as ditch-water. Now, Simon, off with his head, as they said to the traitor.”

But Toby was no traitor; neither was there a semblance of treason about him, as

Simon lifted him to his lips, and quaffed a modest draught.

“Now, Frank,” continued Tom, “we shall improve as we get on. Take a deep, long pull, my friend, and don’t come to a check while it’s possible to carry a head. Genuine malt an’ hops, remember, is not like wishy-washy cat-lap. It musn’t be sipped.”

“Ah, Mister Thomas Piper!” ejaculated Simon, with a mournful shake of the head. “It’s a Christian’s spirit to bend to troubles cheerfully; but there are some strokes of misfortune’s hammer so heavy, that he should be more than mortal to bear them without wincing.”

“Well, well!” replied old Tom, “that’s true enough, no doubt. Take my word for it, however, that he who can face calamity, and look the jade speedily in the eye, takes a powerful step towards making her turn and run away.”

“Better philosophy was never preached from a pulpit,” rejoined Frank.

“ Hah ! ” said Tom Piper, with a deeply drawn sigh as he glanced round the room. “ It’s all very well to preach, Frank ; but when the preacher comes to practise, he often finds it a terrible hard task. Nothing is much more easy that I know of, than telling one’s neighbours what they ought to do, and what they ought *not* to do, Frank,” continued he, leaning slightly forward in his chair. “ We can all do that, some in rough words and some smooth ; but when the time comes for us to set the example, Frank—to shew by our living as well as our preaching—that we have an honest faith in what we say, we as often find, as the contrary, a very great falling off between our sayings and our doings.”

“ Good,” briefly responded Simon.

“ Now I can talk about looking calamity steadily in the eye,” resumed old Tom, “ as a sort of general principle, well enough ; but how *do* I look at her in the face, sirs ? answer me that.”

Tom's auditors looked at him wistfully; but said nothing.

"Exactly so," continued he, as if answered by their silence. "Exactly so. With a tell-tale face which says, I'm a poor, old, broken-hearted man. Is not *that* the difference between Thomas Piper's preaching and his practising, sirs?"

There was a pause after this, which neither appeared inclined to break.

"Fifty-three years," at length said Tom, shading his face with a hand as he rested an elbow on the table, "is a long servitude. I never had any other. It commenced, as you've often heard me say, as errand boy, when I rode Dicky Dolus, the obstinate, black, shaggy pony, and often raced him against the butcher's cob. Those were early and happy days, and long ago as it is, it seems to me but little more than yesterday. That was the beginning," continued he, "and to-night is the ending."

"The more's the pity, Tom," returned Frank Martin. "The more's the pity!"

“For many a year I dreaded what might happen,” said Tom Piper, “from Sir Edward’s increasing expenses and the same thoughtless ways of his father. From beagles he must keep harriers, from harriers to *riding* to hounds. I well remember,” continued he, with a faint smile spreading itself like a gleam of sunshine over his features, “the morning he first told me his plan. I was to have a mount on farmer Stockley’s Ginger, and the farmer, to form a kind of field, was to ride Buttercup. I then said, as I now say, he could persuade a bird to fly into his hand!”

“A greater gentleman never lived,” added Simon Slip. “It always sounded like music to hear him ask after my rheumatism, and I could almost bear a twinge through every marrow-bone at this moment, just to hear him put the question.”

“A wild boy though,” returned old Tom, “a wild boy! And yet I loved him all the better for that. It’s natural one should.

I don't know how it is," continued Tom Piper, "but you 'll find a poor tame mother love her wildest boy the best. She 'll hold up her finger, and shake her head, and groan her deepest—no matter!—let the scapegrace do his worst, and she 'll hug him more than all the rest of the family. It might be on this particular foundation that *my* affection was raised to the pinnacle, and being built, neither time nor change can undermine the building. I watched him from his youth, and saw day by day, what was likely to occur. The check-strings were weaker than spider's web, and he knew it. As an old servant, I did my best to prevent the wheels from running too fast down hill; but I might as well have tried to pull up the world's daily sins by a child's penny kite."

"That Squire Racket ——"

"Squire Racket, Frank!" interrupted Tom Piper, with a look of the profoundest contempt. "His title begins with an S, surely

enough. But then it should be *swindler*, not Squire."

"That's more to the purpose," responded Simon Slip, "a great deal more to the purpose."

"If folks made a rule of calling persons and things by their proper names," rejoined Frank Martin, with the air of a man who had listened quite long enough without being listened to, "there would be a strange and striking improvement in the language of the present times. It's all gilt and varnish now-a-days."

"But there's no occasion for *us* to use the gum and tinsel, Frank," returned Tom. "To night we can speak as we think, and that's some comfort to men born—as it were—to touch their hats to their betters."

"If it had not been for those rascals the Rackets," remarked Simon, "Sir Edward would never have been in the plight he is."

"Be just," added Tom Piper. "Make the rascals a leash and I'm satisfied. There's

another to make the bunch of rascals, Simon."

"That 's true enough," said Simon Slip; "and yet, I *will* say, as I believe, had not the villainy been concocted by those black-hearted devils, my master would never have been in league with them. To be told of what we may do ill, often leads to more than the temptation."

"A sorry excuse," replied Frank; "a sorry excuse, more especially with a man like lawyer Sharp. Between right and wrong," continued he, "there are few better judges."

"Self, self, self," quickly rejoined Tom Piper, bringing his clenched knuckles upon the table; "that is the mainspring to lawyer Sharp's movements. In the country-side, as far as his name was ever breathed, it is well known that he never had, or acknowledged, any other. Money was his cry, as soon as he could lisp, *I* should say, and it will be the last mumbled by his dying lips."

“He has another idol, though,” added Simon Slip, still greatly disposed to ease off the harshness of Tom Piper’s philippic. “He may love money, but he loves his child.”

“Not half so well,” added Tom, bitterly; “his own good and pretty daughter, he doesn’t love half so well, Simon, as he does his money, eh?”

There was no avoiding this home-thrust, and Simon Slip’s crest dropped amazingly. For, strange as it may appear, Simon still had a strong liking for his master, and often sighed when he thought of his own vacant stool in the old, dusty, and dreary office. Not that he would have returned to it, to avoid the workhouse, where, probably, he must have sought an asylum long ere now, had not Tom Piper offered bed and board, and silenced all poor Simon’s scruples, by calling it “a friendly visit.” He pressed also upon Simon’s attention, that he felt the evenings lonesome—that his

garden was not quite in the order he wished to see it, and a little daily weeding and raking would be of the greatest service. He called his attention to the received axiom of "a dinner for one, being a dinner for two," and concluded by saying, that "the obligation of Simon's taking up his residence with him, would be entirely and exclusively on his, Tom Piper's, part. It was well known how much he loved a jolly companion." Tom's eyes twinkled, and his lips pursed with inward laughter, at the idea of Simon being a *jolly* companion—"and to deny him of that which he most enjoyed, would, be a right-down cruelty." It is almost needless to add, that cruelty being as far from Simon Slip's nature as flying is from a pig's, the argument prevailed, and he was at once installed as an inmate of Tom Piper's establishment, without further let or hindrance.

"It's a mournful thing," remarked Tom Piper, again looking round his snug and

neatly-arranged apartment, "to get notice to quit the home one thought never to leave. It was my hope and belief that I should be served with a kind of ejectment, when turned out of these quarters, which would not particularly interfere with the comforts of the outgoing tenant. But, like a great many of the builders of castles in the clouds, I find the stones fall when my hat 's off."

"But you must have seen for a long time," replied Frank Martin, "what was likely to happen."

"True enough," rejoined Tom; "as I have said, there was no mistaking that for years past; and yet, when it comes to the crash, I am stunned with the blow, although I saw the house crumbling piecemeal."

"That 's far from being an unusual circumstance," remarked Frank. "We can look at danger and trouble a good way off; but when they come to our own doors,

we are ready to bolt clean out of the window with fright."

"Have you heard when the sale is to begin?" inquired Simon.

"Within the next week, I hear," replied old Tom, with a heart-fetched sigh. "The servants got their dismissal to-day; and, generous to the last, each received a quarter's hire beyond what was due. It was agreed among themselves to return this amount, and I was asked to take the money back to Sir Edward; but, knowing it would wound his pride far beyond any service such a sum could render, I persuaded them to do nothing of the sort. There's no kindness," continued he, "in blinding a friend when trying to get a gnat out of his eye."

"Where will her ladyship go, I wonder?" inquired Frank Martin.

"Abroad, I'm told," replied Tom. "Herself and Sir Edward will leave together, in a few days; but no one is to be made ac-

quainted with the exact time, or place. Wherever it may be," continued he, "they'll carry the prayers of many with them."

"Ay," rejoined Simon Slip; "that they will, God bless 'em."

"Something will be left, I suppose," observed Frank, "on which they'll be able to live."

"A part of the property," said Simon, "settled on Lady Warren at the time of her marriage, could only be sold subject to her life interest. This, I believe with the rest, has already been conveyed to old John Racket; but as long as she lives the income is secure."

"What an honour it will be to the neighbourhood," said Tom Piper, with a sneer which curled his upper lip into a most unnatural form, "when the Grange comes to be taken possession of by *Swindler* Racket. Shouldn't wonder but the bells will ring for a week at a stretch, and the people around go mad with joy; it's so likely and natural

you know, that they should. If I was to remain and *heard* them," continued Tom, "I'm sure I should become one of the lunatics."

"You don't intend remaining here long, I suppose?" observed Frank Martin.

"To-morrow," returned Tom Piper, with a groan, "I must pack up my linen, and as soon as I open the gate to the carriage, which takes my master and mistress from me, I shall shut my own door and turn my back upon it for ever. But I must have the last look, Frank; and the last office which their old servant can perform will be to close the gate softly on them. I shall do *that*," continued old Tom, with quivering lips, "as if it was on the dead."

CHAPTER IV.

“ The wearied and most loathed worldly life,
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise,
To what we fear of death.”

THROUGHOUT the dark, long night, the miser had tossed wildly upon his bed. His lips were dry and black with thirst, and his hot brow throbbed with the fever burning like a furnace within.

“ Will no one come?” he gasped, raising a scorching palm to his throat; “ will no one come?” and he tried to reach the bell rope just above his head, but the exertion was beyond his strength, and his arm fell

again powerless to his pillow. "Oh, for a drop of water," continued the wretched man, "one drop of water!" and then, writhing with agony, he clasped his hands together and wrung them till every joint cracked.

Slowly the night waned. How long was he to be left—how long deserted in his misery? Would no one bring him a cooling draught? Oh, for one drop of water to assuage that hellish thirst!

"Hoighty-toighty!" exclaimed a voice, jerking back the curtains of his bed with no tender hand. "Why, what's the matter, Mister Racket, Senior?" and there stood Betty, wrapped in a flannel gown, bearing in her hand a flaring candle, and looking, altogether, like a very ugly body in a shroud. "Why, what's the matter, Mister Racket, Senior?" repeated she, throwing a strong light upon his features, by holding a hand behind the candle. "I thought I heard ye stirring, sir."

“ Yes, yes,” he answered hoarsely, “ give me water; quick. ”

“ I ’m not certain,” replied the nurse slowly, as she stooped forward to get a closer look at her master, “ that I ’m exactly justified in giving you water at this moment, Mister Racket, Senior. You ’re hot, sir, very hot.”

“ For the love of mercy ! ” ejaculated the miserable being, bending a supplicating look upon his attendant, “ give me water, Betty, for the love of mercy.”

“ Ha ! ” returned she ; “ it ’s all very well to talk about the love of mercy ; but what particular cupboard is it to be found in, I should like to be told ? You never gave anything, sir, did ye, for the love of mercy ? ” continued the hag, in a bantering tone.

“ Give me water,” fiercely rejoined he, partly raising himself on his elbows. “ Give me water, or I ’ll curse ye ! ”

“ Curse me ! ” echoed the hag, with a

fiendish laugh. "Ho, ho! it's come to that sir, has it! A pretty return for all my tenderness, Mister Racket, Senior!"

"For God's sake, Betty," added he, raising his hands together beseechingly. "For God's sake have mercy upon me! I'm a dying man—a dying man."

"I know it," quickly replied she. "I know you are dying; I saw *that* the moment my eyes fell on yours. There's no mistaking the hand of death when it's ready for its clutch."

"Water," groaned the dying man; "give me water."

"All in good time, sir," said the hag, with exultation in her tone. "It's my turn now, and I'll use it before too late. An hour hence—and less than an hour—it would be too late."

"Water," again cried he. "Give me water."

"There was a day," continued she, without noticing his piteous request, "and you know it well, when *I* was a petitioner

to you, and as earnest an one, as you are now to me in your dying moments, for a cup of water, and—" she stopped short in her speech, and then added, "you denied me."

"A long time since," said the wretched man. "A long time since, Betty."

"There was a day," she repeated, "and you know it well, when I was young and, *you* said, beautiful. What were then your promises? Was I not to be a lady? Was I not to be your *wife*?"

"A long time ago, Betty," replied he, with his glassy eyes flashing in the strong light, which she still kept upon his features. "Give me water."

"And then," she resumed, "when the hour approached for me to become the mother of your child, how was that promise kept? Did you not laugh at my wretchedness, taunt me with many a bitter sneer; and, at length, to save your money, took me to your home, to make me—what?—

your drudge. Yes," continued the hag bitterly, "your drudge, nothing but your drudge. Even my child was not allowed to call me mother. To me he never lisped that name, but from his cradle was taught to look upon me as a thing to scorn and scoff at. Have you not heard, that as you sow, so shall you reap? Think then how you have sowed, and what you reap. The woman's feelings in me have been long since dead; but once I loved you as a woman loves but once. Had you been kind to me, had you kept but a tithe of the promises you swore to keep, I would have resigned life itself to save you one hour's pain. As it is, I stand here, *here*," she repeated, "by your bedside, seeing you gasp with thirst in your dying hour."

"Water," was the feeble answer. "Give me water."

"For such a change," returned she, in the same tone and manner, "from the woman's to the wolf's, there must have been some

great cause. That cause is with yourself. It sprung from your own cold cruelty, and grew, like a rank weed, until it choked every good and generous feeling in my breast. Treated like a beast, I became one. Let *that* be my answer to your present cry."

"Oh, Betty!" ejaculated the miserable being, in a voice which grew momentarily weaker, "have mercy on me."

"I knew my hour would come," said the hag. "I knew my hour would come," repeated she, "and this is it—your last, John Racket; the last that you shall breathe in life. Nothing could touch you but the present pang. Your selfish heart—if heart you have—is so curled and steeled within itself, that nothing short of pain and anguish, such as *this*, can make you feel what others have endured through your devilish acts. To none have you shewed pity, and none to you shall shew it. As you sow, so shall you reap!"

"I have heard," returned the dying man,

in a husky, dry whisper, as he raised himself with a struggling effort in the bed, "that it is never too late——" but his clammy lips refused their office, and he could only point in silence to them.

"Would you say *repent?*" said she, stooping over him. "Would you say that to *me*, John Racket?" and she held the light so close to his face, that he involuntarily shrunk from its glare. "No, no," continued the hag, "we bleed when we are pricked."

An unnatural light glared in his eyes, and as he kept them fixed on hers, his chin fell gradually upon his breast.

"Now then, eh? why what's the matter? Any screw loose, eh?" said Jack Racket, entering the room without the ceremony of giving notice of his advent. "Thought I heard somebody, or something, somehow or some way, giving tongue. Anything amiss, guv'nor?"

"He's going," returned the nurse, in an under voice. "He's going fast."

“ Ah ! ” rejoined Jack, in the same confidential tone; “ it ’s the pace that kills, Bet. And so the guv’nor ’s going fast, is he ? Well ! all I ’ve got to say is, that if he makes a handsome finish of it, it ’s more than could be expected from such an uncommon slow ’un.”

“ Boy—Jack ! ” fiercely shrieked the dying wretch, “ water, give me water.”

“ A pail-full if you like, guv’nor,” replied his son. “ But don’t be so ardent about it. Never heard of a man before so particularly loud in his orders for water, unless there was to be about half brandy in it.”

“ She ’d see me die,” again shrieked his father, pointing to the obdurate hag calmly witnessing his torture. “ She ’d see me die for a drop. She ’d murder me, Jack, she ’d murder your poor old father. Oh that I could live to see her hanged ! Give me water, boy. I die for water.”

“ What a fish you must be ! ” replied Jack. “ But no matter. There ’s no saying but

what *I* may become fond of the liquid some day or other," continued he, bringing a glass and holding it to his father's parched lips.

"Thanks, boy," replied he, eagerly finishing the draught, "thanks. She'd murder me, Jack," and he pointed to his nurse. "She 'd murder your poor old father."

"And so would *he*," she replied, tapping his son's shoulder quickly with a straightened finger. "So would *he*, rather than you should live to balk him of your money."

"Come, come, Miss Elizabeth," rejoined Jack; "draw it a little milder if *you* please, when you're referring to a gent like me, and don't take liberties. It's all very well for one's equals to be familiar," and he dusted his shoulder as he spoke; "but for slaveys it doesn't answer at any price."

"You hear him," returned she, folding her arms across her bosom. "You hear him, John Racket, don't you?"

"Send for Sharp," said the old man, with

an energy which a few moments before he seemed incapable of possessing. "I'll make a new will. It's not too late. I'll leave all to you, Jack—to the last farthing."

"Eh?" ejaculated his son, with a start. "What! haven't you left me *all*, guv'nor?"

"I had," replied his father, in a discontented, whining tone; "but Betty told me you'd spend it, and frightened me, Jack—frightened your poor old father—and made me leave her thousands, Jack; aye, thousands to her."

"*Thousands!*" exclaimed Jack, turning a look of ferocity upon the offender. "Why—you, Bet—what have you been about, eh? you said, and swore, too, that it was only a small slice, a moderate legacy."

She said nothing, but waved a hand in silent contempt.

"Oh!" resumed Jack, "this won't do. I can't stand such a robbery as this. I'll bring 'Torney here in a twinkling."

"No, no," replied the old man, with tre-

pidation. "You mustn't leave me. I musn't be left alone with her now, Jack. She'd murder—"

"Murder ye!" interrupted the hag vehemently. "If murder had been my intent, I should not have waited, John Racket, till now."

"Of course she wouldn't, guv'nor," rejoined Jack. "Don't be alarmed about her murdering ye. Bet only meant a quiet little bit of robbery on the cross. Thought," continued he, turning to the object of his remark, "we understood each other better than this."

She made him no reply; but again waving her hand, turned round and left the room.

"Is the—the—the candle going out, Jack?" asked his father.

"Going out!" repeated Jack, snuffing the wick. "No, dont you see it isn't?"

"And—and it gets darker, Jack. It gets darker."

"Just the contrary," rejoined his son, going to the window, and opening the shutters a flood of sunshine streamed into the room. "There," said he, "what do you say to that for a dazzler?"

"Where are you?" returned the old man, with his lustreless eyes wandering round the room. "I don't see you, lad. I don't see you."

"Then you're getting particularly blind all of a sudden," added Jack. "Here I am, and you must make your mind as easy as you can while I go for 'Torney. Your offspring mustn't be plundered, guv'nor."

The old man gave no answer.

"Nothing like having all, you know," continued Jack. "Keep money together and it makes itself, was your chirp, as long as I can remember. Now, what a *stooped* thing it would be to let that fiddle-headed Bet Grudgeall cut into the fat. Nothing could be weaker, *I* should say."

At this moment a strange sound—not

unlike air bubbles rising to burst on the surface of water—issued from the dying man's throat, and his eyes—wide opened—became fixed in a blinkless stare upon his son's.

The candle was out.

CHAPTER V.

“When we in our viciousness grow hard,
(O misery on’t) the wise Gods seal our eyes.”

SCARCELY assured of his father’s death, and disconcerted only by its suddenness, Jack Racket began to ponder upon the policy of the conduct to be adopted without loss of time, although the exulting thought of his now being “a man of means,” well nigh drove the power of reflection from him.

“The carrion crow soon winds the dead,” said he. Bet will be here in a brace of shakes. I wonder where that will is?” and he pressed his hands upon his forehead as if to assist him in the discovery. “It is not likely to be

far off," continued he, and as he spoke, his eyes fell on a small iron chest, standing on a stool by the bedside.

"No doubt," resumed he, "but it's here. The guv'nor would be sure to have such a valuable close at hand, I know."

He tried the lock, but it was securely fastened; and then the thought flashed across his brain, that probably, Betty had possessed herself of the key.

"Shall be beaten now, if I don't take amazing care," said he, beginning a vigorous search for the key, by ransacking the pockets of his father's garments, and even turning them inside out, that it might not escape his scrutiny. Every drawer was pulled out and the contents rifled; every nook and corner minutely looked into, and scarcely a crack or crevice in the room, capable of holding a pin, was free from his keen examination. Fruitless, however, were his endeavours, and he began to feel his task hopeless, when he passed his fingers under

the pillow, on which his father's head rested, and with a cry of triumph, drew forth the key.

It was the work of an instant to unlock the chest, and Jack's eyes were almost dazzled at beholding a number of small bags filled with gold, and so arranged that their contents might be seen upon opening the chest.

"What a picture!" exclaimed he, his looks gloating with pleasure at what he saw. "What a picture!"

So intense, indeed, appeared Jack Racket's joy, that for some time his senses seemed quite wrapped up in contemplating the sight before him. He neither stirred hand nor foot; but stood riveted to the spot, as if fascinated with pleasure. At length he took one of the bags, and weighing it in his hand said, "Two hundred and fifty yellow boys if there's one. What a precious little supply of the ready to begin with!" Each bag was weighed in turn, and it was not until

he arrived at the tenth and last, that he became aware that a document tied with a piece of red tape, sealed, and endorsed in a bold, flourishing hand, "THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF JOHN RACKET, ESQUIRE," formed a portion of the contents of the chest.

With little regard for the seals, Jack tore them off, and rending the tape in twain, unfolded the creaking skin of parchment, and began reading its contents with devouring and eager eyes. The legal terms and technical phrases bothered him sadly; but he soon learned that "in consideration of the great care and attention bestowed upon the testator, the said John Racket, by Elizabeth Grudgeall, his nurse, attendant, and housekeeper, he the said testator, the said John Racket doth give, devise, and bequeath, and by these presents doth hereby give, devise, and bequeath unto the said Elizabeth Grudgeall, his housekeeper, attendant, and nurse, the sum of three thousand pounds of lawful money of Great

Britain, to be paid to her, the said Elizabeth Grudgeall, within one-and-twenty days after the funeral of the said testator, the said John Racket. And the said testator, the said John Racket, does hereby further direct, order, and request, that the money contained in the chest in which this, his last will and testament will be found, shall be expressly appropriated for the payment and discharge of the said above-mentioned legacy—”

A loud moan escaped Jack's lips. He could read no more. That shining, glittering heap; was it to slip through his fingers at the very moment he thought every guinea his own, and at his sole and immediate disposal? It was madness to think of it!

“I'm what they call the heir-at-law,” soliloquized he, while his face became suddenly of a scarlet hue; “I'm the only offspring, and if there was no will, must have all—down to the last mag. It's a great pity the governor should have—” and he glanced with a mixed expression of fear and caution over his shoulder as he held

the parchment above the candle—"should have rendered this kind of proceedin' necessary. But what else can be done, when people are so weak and silly? Besides," continued he, as the parchment began to crack, blister, and smoke; "it's just what the gov'nor intended. He was frightened into cutting the ready off from his offspring, and if his precious life had been spared a little longer, would have done just what I 'm doing, only in a different style. But out of the mire a flower often springs," said Jack; "I shall now hold the ribands in my own hands, and not be tied up short by the head with a parcel of 'Torney's chaff. Miss Elizabeth, I wonder what you'd take in the pound for your bless-ed legacy?" and holding the remains of the crackling skin between a finger and thumb, he flung them into the empty grate, and fanned the blaze until nothing was left but a few black, and crisp ashes.

As soon as the destruction was complete,

he closed the lid of the chest, and carefully depositing the key in one of his own pockets, left the room hallooing loudly for Betty.

"Am I wanted?" returned she, in a piercing voice, from below.

"Wanted!" repeated he, hurrying down the staircase. "I'm sure I don't know whether *you* 're wanted or not; but it isn't a case for the doctor now."

"Has he——"

"Yes he has," interrupted Jack. "There's no doubt about it."

"I thought," added the beldam, with a chuckle, as she stood across the stairs so as to impede Jack's further descent, "that there wouldn't be time for him to make another will."

"Then you thought right, you see, Miss Elizabeth," he rejoined. "Allow me to give you the go-by."

"And so you think my share too much, eh?" said she, wagging her head, without noticing his request to give him room to pass.

“Opinions don’t always agree on those subjects, Miss Elizabeth,” replied Jack; “allow me to give you the go-by,” he repeated, but she maintained her ground, and did not offer an inch of room.

It might be difficult to define the cause; but suddenly a strange feeling took possession of Jack’s system, and he felt a dread of the being now standing before him—one who had been the butt for his shafts of ridicule and vulgar abuse for years. He even shrunk from her, and as she pointed upwards to the dead man’s chamber and said, “I want you there,” his knees trembled, and his cheeks blanched with terror.

“Presently,” replied he, in a faltering voice. “Another time.”

“Now, *I* say,” she rejoined. “I want you there,” and she again raised a finger, “before you cross the threshold of this house.”

Without reply—for he felt resistance vain—Jack turned round and crept, with a reluctant step, back to the chamber of death, closely followed by his companion.

For a few moments she stood calmly looking at the corpse in silence, and then—as if communing with herself—said, “With the dead there should be no hatred!”

“As to any ill-feeling,” remarked Jack, with a strong inclination to effect a retreat, “about that little quiet bit of robbery, I’m sure I have none. You’ll find me liberal.”

“Hush!” returned she, authoritatively. “This is no time nor place to speak of that. There lies your father, John Racket, as you and I must lie some day.”

“Quite true,” said Jack; “quite correct.”

“As long as he lived,” continued she, “I was sworn to keep a secret, which had it been known in years gone by, might, and indeed must, have made a great difference in your conduct towards me.”

“Ha!” ejaculated Jack. “Indeed!”

“I am not, and was not, bound to keep it *longer* than he lived,” said she, “and therefore the most fitting moment I can reveal it is now.”

"Out with whatever it is," replied he. "I can't bear being hung up on this sort of mysterious hook."

"I trusted *him*," continued Betty, pointing to the inanimate form stretched on the bed before them. "I trusted him, John Racket, but he deceived me."

"Very likely," added Jack. "I can quite believe you without the necessity of hard swearing. Go on."

"It may therefore be a matter of surprise," resumed she, "that with broken faith, I did not retaliate by breaking faith."

"I should," briefly returned Jack.

"And so perhaps *I* might," added she, "would it have served my purpose; but knowing that it could not, the attempt was never made, nor thought of."

"Cool," observed he, "and a good kind of calculation of the odds."

"What *you* might have been, John Racket," said his companion, looking at him earnestly in the face, "I know not; but I can only

look upon you as you are, and have been."

"Don't flatter me," returned Jack, beginning to regain some of his lost assurance. "Pro—ceed."

"Cruel, crafty, and subtle as the snake," continued she, "and more selfish than all, you have had in this house full scope for exercising every evil feeling of your nature, and little, or perhaps none, for the hidden good which may still be within. For bad, indeed, must be that heart in which lurks no one redeeming virtue."

"How you preach!" exclaimed Jack. "I thought you were going to tell me something—a kind of wrinkle. As to my redeeming virtue," continued he, "that lies in my chink, as it does in other folks."

"Hear me to the end," said Betty; "hear me to the end! For the drudge," and she pressed a lank, hard hand upon her bosom roughly, "there could be no respect?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

“No love?”

Jack could not check a rising laugh.

“No affection?”

Jack laughed outright.

“Had your answers been different,” continued she, sternly, “they would have been but a coward’s lies. With them I am contented; for I wanted but the truth. In this household there were no such ties, although composed of father, son, and—*mother*.”

“What?” shouted Jack, staggering upon his heels.

“Keep your eyes in their sockets,” she replied, “and your hair on your scull. *I’m your mother*.”

“Oh don’t!” gasped Jack, still reeling backwards. “Say you’re only in fun. Say it’s a joke. I never knew my mother—never asked. But say you’re in fun, Betty, only in fun.”

“The tormentor of my life,” added she, “the gadfly of my existence, was my own child, and that child—yourself.”

"I shall go mad!" cried Jack, "I know I shall. I feel as if—Oh dear me." And he sunk panting and helpless into a chair.

"Stung by your wanton cruelty and ribald jests," she resumed, "I tried, more than once to revenge myself on ye, by getting the whole of the property into my own hands. By these means, I knew where your servile spirit would be—in the dust, and at my feet. In fitful moments of spleen and anger, your father swore to leave me all, and you—a beggar. Then again—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Jack, in a faint voice, "I know all that. I can understand those particulars without cutting more deeply into 'em, Betty—or as I should say my honored parent—Oh dear me, that it should come to this! But," continued he, "just tell me, am I on the square or on the cross? What I mean is, were you spliced before I was dropped?"

"There was a promise," she replied, "but it was never fulfilled."

“Am I then a bas——?” the concluding syllable was choked in its utterance. “Ain’t I heir-at-law?”

He eyed her narrowly as he spoke, and clutched the arms of the chair convulsively.

She gave him a steady look, as if searching for the cause of these questions; but made no reply.

“Ruined!” cried Jack, at the strained pitch of his voice. “Ruined, as I’m a miserable gent!”

CHAPTER VI.

“ ‘Tis he, I ken the manner of his gait.’ ”

UPON the retrieving of Miss Sally Beans, it was resolved by jovial Joe, to keep a strict watch and ward over that damsel's person for the future. With this object, and by the suggestion of Luke Puffy, some iron bars, forming a strong grating, were screwed, nailed, and riveted before the casement of that virgin's dormitory, and a lock of unusual dimensions fixed to the door of her bedroom. A couple of massive bolts, also, were added as further means of security, and unless Miss Beans possessed the powers

of winging a sylph-like flight through the key-hole, or up the chimney, there appeared no chance whatever of her making a second successful attempt to run away from the parental roof, had she felt so disposed. So far, however, from there being any reason to imagine that Miss Beans entertained the spectre of a notion on this head, justice demands that her demeanour led, and directed a totally opposite conclusion. Meek as a dove—mild as an unfledged pigeon—Sally bore her captivity with the stoicism of a martyr, and the resignation of a victim. Without a complaint, without a murmur, she abandoned herself to the “*un-ke-ind*” fates with a placidity of temper, which to be appreciated must have been witnessed.

Sometimes—but at intervals far and wide—her nose would be seized with that rabbit-like twitching which savoured of irascibility, but this was only when the thought arose bubbling in her memory, that besides the loss of a husband in the poltroon Pug, she

was also minus her poultry savings. These were bitter dregs in the cup of disappointment, and Miss Beans tasted them, occasionally, with a somewhat wry countenance.

Little would any one suppose that it was possible for the miller to become stern, austere, and almost tyrannical. But such was his conduct to his captive, that nothing less can be said of it. He never permitted her to take an airing unless closely guarded by himself ; and even when she went to church, he walked close by her side wielding a huge stick or club, thickly studded with hard knots, and walked in a melodramatic gait, such as injured parents can alone be supposed to strut in. Suspicion, too, seemed to haunt his mind, and he glanced at each bush and thicket, making, from time to time, wild cuts at thistles and the tops of brambles, as if decapitating imaginary enemies, and performing the wildest deeds of vengeance.

At the considerable sacrifice of his social

comforts, Joe, armed with his stick thickly studded with hard knots, would parade, like a sentinel on duty, before his own door, and with a pipe between his lips, express the mental desire of seeing that bold member of the human family who would rashly make the attempt to rob him of his daughter. "Not"—as Joe most properly remarked—"that he would get a *great* bargain; but then an Englishman had his rights. They were born with him, and it was a glorious charter of the most ancient date, that however humble the home of a free-born Briton, it was his castle, in which no liberties were to be taken with impunity. Taking Sally from the premises was a very great liberty, and if any addition was requisite to whip up the froth of the offence, it consisted in the fact of making Meteor an unwilling instrument in the transaction." So jovial Joe thought; so jovial Joe said; and these sentiments found an apt and ready echo in the worthy host of the Duck and Gridiron.

From the date of her disgrace, even the household duties were taken out of the hands and direction of Miss Beans, and Joe not only selected his dinner, but cooked it. Often might he be seen peeling the homely potato, broiling the unpretending chop, and doing the general culinary business. Sally was ejected from the domestic throne; but no one should usurp it. She never filled it with much honor, or great satisfaction; but no one should take her place. Joe shook his head at the thought—the bare and stripped idea—and betook himself to the work harder than ever.

All this persecution, however; all this contumely and humiliation, Miss Beans bore with the most exemplary fortitude and Christian resignation. Indeed, she appeared rather to like it than otherwise. There was something flattering to Sally's vanity to be made the object of so much care and importance, and for the first time in her life she found herself the centre—the radius—of

parental watchfulness and solicitude, in addition to the gratifying fact of being the great object of village gossip for many a wide mile around. Miss Beans was a candidate for notoriety, and like many such candidates, thought little of the way in which she was canvassed, so long as her object of publicity was achieved.

The siege—if siege it can be called, when the defensive capitulated, succumbed, gave over, and knocked under without a struggle—had lasted some few weeks, and jovial Joe still appeared as resolute and wary in his watch and ward as ever, when as he was pacing one evening, in measured tread, before the door of his domicile—mingling an occasional sigh with the thick volumes of tobacco-smoke curling at intervals from his lips—he espied a form approaching, which, at a glance, he knew could not be other than that of the first cousin to Satan—Pug himself.

They had not met since the memorable

event, and so chary and watchful was Pug of avoiding any path, place, highway, or by-way in which the miller was likely to be found, that it appeared not improbable they would never face each other again. It was, therefore, the more extraordinary that he should now boldly lift the latch of Joe's garden gate, and in long, lurching steps, stride towards him, until he stood within a few feet of the injured parent.

Joe's stick performed an involuntary flourish; but luckily for Pug's head and shoulders, it was lowered from mid air until it quietly rested, with a kind of emphatic full-stop, at the miller's feet. From head to foot, Joe slowly measured his unexpected visitor, and then with a frown, which might have been borrowed from angry Jove himself, thundered the query of "Well, sir! and what have *you* got to say?"

"Little," replied Pug, raising his shoulder to his ears and stretching his long arms and fingers to his knees. "Little, Mister Joseph

Beans, and yet I'd like, sir, to say that little before we part."

"Are you not," and the miller brought his stick with a violent dig into the gravel, "are you not ashamed to look me in the face?"

"Amazingly so, Mister Beans," returned Pug, making a strong effort to render his countenance consistent with his declaration. "I am so amazingly ashamed of myself, sir," continued he, "that I couldn't look in my own face, if I had the opportunity."

"Are you not a rascal?" asked Joe, again bringing the end of his stick into the gravel.

"A bigger one was never hanged, sir," replied Pug. "Take my word for it."

"A villain?"

"Out-an'-out."

"Rogue?"

"Live by roguery."

"Hypocrite?"

“ Awful ! ”

“ Vagabond ? ”

“ Bred and born one.”

“ Liar ? ”

“ Never heard a lie yet, sir,” said Pug, deliberately, “ but what I could beat by lengths.”

This confession, as was intended, had a soothing influence upon Joseph Beans, and he wisely and considerately thought, that any one having the moral courage to make so unreserved an acknowledgment of his faults, might also be on the broad and highway to atonement.

“ Very good,” added the miller, after a slight pause, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow, for Joe had warmed considerably with his subject ; “ now let me hear what you ’ve got to say.”

“ I’m not exactly in your good books, Mister Beans,” began Pug, holding his head on one side, as he peered into the miller’s face, with the twinkling look of a

monkey ripe for mischief. "Isn't that so, sir?"

"That is so," replied Joe. "Precisely so."

"As I thought," rejoined Pug, "and the cause is the dirty trick I played with Miss Beans."

The miller bowed—bowed grandly and stiffly—but made no answer.

"It was a dirty trick," continued Pug, "and many a man has served a long apprenticeship at picking oakum for a much less kind of criminal offence; but it wouldn't be fair, even to such a rascal as *I* am, sir, for you to have a worse opinion of me than I deserve, Mister Beans."

There was a tone in this plaintive and self-accusatory speech, which went direct to the miller's most vulnerable point, and the thought instantly flashed across his brain that the sable prince of darkness himself was frequently not so black as he was represented.

Pug saw his vantage, and with great

skill followed it up by adding, "We all have our faults and weaknesses, sir, and when poverty—poverty such as mine, Mister Beans—is always close at hand, it's more than the stoutest of mortals could say, his strength would be equal to resist temptation."

There was a loose half-crown in a pocket of the miller's breeches, which he began to handle in a way as if he intended to part with it.

"You behaved handsome, sir," resumed Pug, "in giving me five full-weight golden guineas to throw up the notion of making myself your son-in-law. The bargain was struck, if you remember, at farmer Stockley's, where I just dropped in at the moment I was wanted. Sometimes," continued he with a grin, "I have not been so fortunate."

"The bargain being struck," said Joe, with great gravity, and the half-crown, at the same time, became settled at the bottom of

his pocket, "how came you to break the contract?"

"Did you never hear that, sir," asked Pug. "Did you never hear *that*, Mister Joseph Beans?"

"Never," replied the miller; "I have heard nothing."

"In that case," rejoined Pug, "you had better be told all."

"But not here," returned Joe. "We'll go inside, for the day draws in apace and the evening's chilly."

"As you please, sir," respectfully replied Pug, having, at this moment, the pleasing vision of a jug of the miller's foaming best October standing before his eyes. He had tasted it before, and highly approved of the brewing.

"Talking is generally dry work," remarked Joe, as he entered his house, "and listening is, sometimes, much dryer. What say ye to a little moisture before we go on?"

This suggestion met with Pug's warmest approval, and his eloquence almost failed in

giving expression to his feelings from their warmth. He even stammered as he spoke.

“Now then,” said Joe, after each had indulged in a deep draught of his own particular, “give went. I see what you want. There’s nothing like went.”

“Thank *you*, sir,” replied Pug; “I will. You’ve been one o’ my best friends, Mister Beans, and for your good turns, I have made nothing but bad *re*-turns. There was that time when Meteor won so nobly, you gave me a new hat and a guinea, and yet I must hunt you home and scare the hackles almost off your head. It was Miss Beans, sir,” continued he, dropping his voice, “who paid me to do it. She said, as you wouldn’t take her to the races, she’d know where you went, who you talked to, and all about everything, so as to be able to throw a few circumstances in your teeth when occasions fitted.”

“I see,” remarked Joe, with a sage nod. “Go on.”

“From this time our understanding com-

menced," said Pug, "and Miss Beans settled every thing herself, in about as short a snap, as ever I heard tell of. We were to be married, settled, have a furnished house, and a family before you could wink."

"She 'd beat a flying comet," said the miller, "in a match of this sort. My belief is," continued he, whistling a few bars of a lively air by way of an interlude, "that Sally will *swaller* a man before she dies. I think she 'll swaller a man, buttons, bones, and all!"

"The rest is soon told, sir," continued Pug. "I was satisfied enough with your terms—more especially when you told me I should be none the richer for marrying Miss Beans—until tempted by her poultry savings. Said she 'Theophilus'—she had a nice winning way of calling me Theophilus—'my pa will come round in the course of time; but as waiting for his consent would be a most tedious proceeding, we will defy the tyrant, and fall back upon my poultry savings.' These

were her very words, Mister Joseph Beans, and the temptation proved too much for me. By day and by night, I dreamt of these poultry savings, and to take possession of 'em, either by hook or by crook, I was firmly resolved. Several schemes presented themselves to view; but Miss Beans proved so particularly suspicious and guarded, that nothing less than really running away with her, would ever have made her part with a copper, and it was not until we were seated in Sampson's waggon, that she entrusted me with the foot of the old black stocking, which held a nice little round sum close to the toes."

"Your object then was the money," said the miller; "not to deceive me!"

"Exactly so, sir," returned Pug. "I had no intention this time of playing you a slippery trick, whatever that might be called which I played Miss Beans. I so managed as to pass the Duck and Gridiron, just as Mister Puffy would be likely to be stirring,

and knowing what he 'd do, provided he saw us, in telling you of what had happened, I reckoned upon the rise of events just as they came to pass."

"But if we had not come up when we did?" inquired Joe.

"You'd have come up later in the day, sir," replied Pug; "there was Meteor, remember, against Sampson's old slow and heavy, and he could beat *that*, I suppose, between sun-rise and sun-set."

The miller laughed at this facetious supposition, and seemed to enjoy it amazingly.

"Besides," resumed Pug, "even if you had not come to the rescue at all, I should have stolen away at the first convenient opportunity, and left Miss Beans in the care of Sampson. He would have brought her back, sir, take my word for it."

"I've not the slightest doubt o' that," responded Joe, "not the slightest; but your conduct—" and he shook his head—"was very so-so."

“Call it by the proper name, Mister Joseph Beans,” added Pug; “don’t varnish it, sir,” continued he, stretching out his long limbs and throwing his head back upon his chair; “call it a robbery, sir; call it a robbery.”

“And what has become of the ill-gotten gains?” asked Joe, with an eye, perhaps, to a partial restoration.

“They must be spoken of as things that were, sir, not as things that are,” replied Pug. “The poultry savings have vanished.”

“That being the case,” added the miller; “what may be your particular object in coming to see me to-night?”

“To set myself as right with you as circumstances will allow, Mister Joseph Beans,” returned Pug; “before taking my leave of these parts for long, and it may be for ever.”

“What! are you going away?” said the miller, with undisguised astonishment.

“Aye, sir,” was the answer; “I’ve got

my dismissal from a service which, I fear, I never did much credit to, although I always did my duty to my master, let who will gainsay it. And now I must seek a living elsewhere, Mister Joseph Beans, and while hares and rabbits feed by moonlight, I have little fear of being able to *make* a living."

"A dangerous one," observed Joe; "a dangerous one."

"Perhaps so, sir, to some folks," replied Pug; "but not to me. When a man has nothing whatever to lose—neither money, situation, nor character, there's not much risk, Mister Joseph Beans, for *him* to run. The venture may be taken without a too nice balancing of the chances on his part."

The miller thought there was some good sound reasoning in this observation, and he began to make an attempt to apply it as a political economist to those Bedouins of the human family, who, in levying black mail upon their fellows, might, perhaps, be des-

perate rather from necessity than from choice ; but Joe's brain became a perfect chaos of conjectures and mental speculations, and he gave up the struggle in despair.

"There's one thing more, sir, I should like to say," remarked Pug, gathering up his limbs and rising from his chair.

"Do so," replied the miller, waving a hand as a signal of his entire approbation. "Make a clean breast while you're about it."

"I was a sort of forlorn hope, with Miss Beans," rejoined Pug; "what may be called, sir, the last card in the pack. Now, as a little amends for enjoying myself on her poultry savings I would ask you, Mister Joseph Beans, as a favour of the first kind, not to keep her caged up any longer. Let her out, sir, and be as easy as your old slippers on the score of her either running away, or being run away with. Neither event will come off."

"I begin to have the same opinion," re-

turned Joe, "and between now and to-morrow morning will turn the matter over in my night-cap. There's nothing better than letting one's thoughts set like milk for creaming. The best, then, is sure to come uppermost."

"You bear me no ill-will, sir, I hope," said Pug, preparing to take his departure.

"None, lad," replied the miller. "You have never done me any real harm, and if ye had, and said you were sorry for it, I'd freely forgive ye. Give me your hand."

Hearty was the grasp which they gave each other, and as Pug withdrew his hand from jovial Joe's, he found a half-crown in the palm.

It might have been the effect of

"An idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy ;"

but as Pug wended his way from the miller's house, he thought he heard a voice utter in a sepulchral tone,

"Where are my poultry savings?"

CHAPTER VII.

“Weariness

Can snore upon the flint, when restive sloth
Finds the down pillow hard.”

THE stars began to grow paler, and the dew-drops to glitter in the first slanting rays of light, as Pug, with Nip trotting by his side, entered a thick copse at the bottom of the park, and within sight of the Grange. Taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked the high paled gate leading into the wood, and proceeding some yards along a narrow and winding path, over which thick brambles crept and twined, he came to the foot of a gigantic and knagged pollard oak.

"Jack," said a voice from the inside of the tree. "Jack."

"That's me by another name," replied Pug, pulling away a small faggot, which barricaded an opening in the trunk, and exposing to view the interior of the dry and crumbling hollow.

"Jack," repeated the voice, "Jack," and forthwith stalked a sable-plumed jackdaw, holding his grey head on one side so as to peer with greater ease and penetration in Pug's features.

It has been asserted, that the countenance of each member of the human family, approaches either in form or expression to that of some of the lower animals. Be this as it may, no close observer could have been otherwise than struck with the peculiar resemblance existing between Pug and the jackdaw, as they stood glancing at each other with their bright, quick, and mischief-loving eyes.

"You want your breakfast, eh, Sam?"

observed Pug, producing a very small rabbit from some secret nook or corner of his garments, and making a few skilful cuts with his knife in the limbs, he jerked the diminutive victim from its skin like a pea from the shell, and it was caught in the beak of the bird most skilfully before touching the ground.

With a stately tread Sam strutted away with his prize, and was on the point of entering the retreat, when, as if recollecting that he had neglected an important duty, he suddenly dropped his breakfast and made a spiteful snap at Nip's tail. With a howl, expressive of what he dreaded from former visitations, Nip placed the object of attack as far as possible out of harm's way, and plunged forward under the shelter of a neighbouring sloe bush.

"Come," said Pug, "none o' that, Master Sam. If it hadn't been for Nip's finding the cony's nest, you might have gone short for a meal this morning."

Master Sam seemed appeased with this information, and again seizing the rabbit, he flapped his wings, and danced with a nimble step into the hollow tree.

It was a strange habitation, and yet within the scooped shell of that giant of the wood, Pug had enjoyed many a night's unbroken sleep. His bed consisted of a bundle of straw spread upon the ground, and although his limbs appeared somewhat cramped from want of space, still Pug's was an enviable couch compared to many whose heads rested on eider-down. He had no regret for the past; no care for the future; but rose in the morning like the wild birds which often roosted in the boughs above his head, and heeded as little what might befall him before sun-set. He had no friends, no relations that he ever heard of. Some one told him long ago—but he forgets even who that was—that his father was transported for a deed of violence, and his mother gave birth to him in the parish workhouse. She died in

child-bed, he believed, for no one—that he could remember—ever tended him with a mother’s care. And so Pug, at a very early age, made the discovery that it was indispensable for him to get his own crust as best he could, and not possessing the strength to wield a spade or pickaxe, he had recourse to the natural sharpness of his wits, which necessity soon ground to a very keen edge, and then the world shook its head with virtuous indignation, and called him “vagabond.” And with this title, Pug roved from place to place, levying contributions upon society, and making himself as comfortable as the charity of some, the hen-roosts of others, and the general weakness of the many, would permit. Chance—the goddess to whom so many are indebted for the proud eminence on which they crow their deeds of chivalry—at length brought him to the notice of Sir Edward Warren, and from that day his star became in the ascendant.

Revelling in the superstitious dread with

which he was regarded, Pug never permitted an opportunity to pass without an endeavour to add to his notoriety, and this was not a little increased by his taking up his abode, like an owl, in the hollow of the lightning-struck oak. Sir Edward, entering into his quaint humour, made no objection to his becoming its occupier, although at the apparent risk of losing most of the game with which the cover abounded; but Pug would sooner have punched every tooth from his jaws with a rusty horse-shoe nail, than have touched a single head. With no assigned duties in the service which he now entered, he had ample leisure for indulging in the whims and tricks for which he was so notorious, and as none were fraught with any real harm or injury, Sir Edward paid little or no attention to the complaints, which occasionally reached his ears concerning them.

In this way Pug had become a privileged retainer, and he returned the favours bestowed

upon him by his master with fidelity and gratitude.

The goods and chattels within Pug's domicile, may be summed up in a remarkably short inventory. Exclusive of the bundle of straw, there was a small canvas bag stuffed with chaff by way of a pillow. A dry and hollow bone stuck in a square lump of clay, acted as a candlestick for his rushlight, and a small iron vessel, standing on three legs, was the only culinary utensil in his possession. In this, however, some of the most fragrant soup and stews often sent forth a delicious odour; and if the ingredients, occasionally, consisted of a questionable duck, a leveret from a neighbouring manor, or a turkey poult found wandering in the standing corn, it would have been a difficult undertaking to have identified the materials as soon as they were dropped into this crucible. A chipped stone pitcher, an iron spoon, a wooden platter, and a two-pronged fork, completed the list of Pug's household goods.

Within an easy hop from the ground a peg was driven on which Sam generally perched, and from his elevated position watched, with his sly, twinkling eyes, every movement of those below. Nip—and particularly Nip's tail—formed an especial object of his attention, and whenever the opportunity offered, he made that animal fervently wish he had been born without such a member to his body.

“I can manage with as little sleep as a fox,” said Pug, throwing himself down on straw, and curling his limbs round; “but night and day won't do. I must have forty winks,” and scarcely had he ceased speaking when a loud snoar proclaimed him to be in the land of dreams.

Barely the number of winks could he have taken, when a loud voice rudely broke his pleasant slumber, and upon opening his reluctant eyelids, he saw Robin and his spaniel standing before him.

“Come, lad,” said he. “The sun's been up long ago.”

“So have I,” replied Pug, with a yawn, a stretch, and a shake; “so have I, friend Robin. I was up some hours before the sun.”

“What doing?” briefly asked the mole-catcher.

“Wiring,” returned Pug. “I have made up my mind,” said he, springing to his feet, “that there sha’n’t be a hare left on the land. I’ll trap, too, or poison every fox in the country,”

“Except those that may fall to my share,” interrupted Robin. “The skins, you know, are worth something.”

“Well!” added Pug, “so as they are killed that’s all I care for. Squire Racket’s hounds may hunt a red herring; but they shall find a fox but seldom, I trow.”

“There ’ll be some difference then between his and Sir Edward’s,” observed the mole-catcher.

“That I ’ll take care of,” said Pug. “It will do me good to see the covers drawn

blank, and they shall do that, season after season, as long as I can hang about these parts."

"You must give up your roost soon, I suppose," remarked Robin.

"Yes," replied Pug; "like the rest of the tenants, I shall get my notice to quit, no doubt."

"It's hard," rejoined the mole-catcher, "to turn out from an old nest, let it be as rough a one as this."

"Rough!" repeated Pug. "I'd rather remain as I am, than have the finest homestead in the county. It suits me, neighbour Robin. I was bred wild, perhaps, and like a hawk or kite, can't bear a cage."

"I was thinking," said the mole-catcher, thoughtfully, "that we might do a little quiet stroke of business together, while there's time and opportunity. I haven't done much in the poaching line," continued he, "although in my early days I sometimes wired a hare more for amusement than pro-

fit. I also had some nets," and as he spoke, he drew from his fishing pannier a bundle of trammels and threw them on the ground.

"They 're strong and in sound condition for old ones," remarked Pug, pursing his lips with an effort to conceal his laughter.

"Yes," replied Robin, with a short, dry cough. "They 've been kept dry."

"Ah!" ejaculated Pug; "so I should say."

"If we were to set these nets," resumed the mole-catcher, without noticing the sarcastic retort, "and beat the covers slowly, we might get a few long-tails, perhaps. Pheasants are easier taken in the day than in the night."

"How do you know that," inquired Pug, "if you 're so very innocent about the poaching line?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Robin, with a return of his short, dry cough, "so I 've heard people say who knew."

"Well!" returned Pug, "whoever says

so, says the truth. And as I shouldn't like to leave a feather for Squire Racket, we 'll do our best to make a good thinning of the long-tails."

"Get your breakfast first," said his companion.

"That's soon got," replied Pug, and taking a brown loaf from a wallet slung across his shoulders, he cut a thick, substantial slice and began eating it, with great apparent relish.

"I should want some sauce with that crust," observed the mole-catcher.

"Hunger's mine," replied Pug.

Upon finishing his very frugal meal, he took a long draught from the stone pitcher, and then announced that he was ready for operations.

It was now broad daylight, and the sun's dazzling rays flashed in the tints of autumn like burnished gold. With every gust of the whistling wind, which hummed and droned through the trees, showers of sered

and yellow leaves fell rustling to the ground. Crystal drops hung upon every bough and twig, and the points of the grass were slightly crisped with the rime of the hoar frost.

"We shall soon have winter with us again," said Robin, treading in the footsteps of his companion, as he led the way through the middle of the wood.

"Aye," replied Pug; "the seasons soon come round. It seems but yesterday that the violets were blooming, and here we have—"

Trump at this moment, made a dash at something, and as he did so, a woodcock's wing flapped from the ground.

"Woodcocks with us again," continued Pug, pointing to the bird darting through the trees with the speed of light.

"He's an early one," said the mole-catcher. "I must set a spring for him."

"I suppose he may be counted as caught," remarked Pug.

"Well," rejoined Robin; "since there's

nothing easier, I think you'll see him with a broken neck before this time to-morrow."

Upon coming to an opening cut in the wood, the mole-catcher threw his basket from his shoulders, and selecting a long narrow net, began to stretch it along the ride, by propping it up on forked sticks, furnished by Pug's ready knife.

"I forgot to ask ye," said Robin, arranging the net so as the edge, falling on the ground, was loose and turned inward, "whether you were lucky last night?"

"Pretty fair," replied his companion, carelessly; "I hung up two brace and a half, and met Sampson's slow-and-heavy just in time to send 'em up."

"A good and wise course," replied Robin; "the sooner one's fingers are clear of forbidden fruit the better."

In a few moments the trammel was tilted, and Pug undertook the office of beating the game up to it, while the mole-catcher re-

mained to make sure of all that might become caught within the meshes.

“Keep the dogs well back,” said he, with caution marked in his words and manner.

‘Remember, we don’t want to flush the long-tails; they must run to suit our tactics.’

“Aye, aye,” returned Pug, almost petulantly. “I know, or many a lesson’s been thrown away;” and without further comment, he whistled Nip and Trump to his heels, and strode away to the farthest end of the corner.

In a short time an occasional stroke with a stick against a tree announced Pug’s gradual advance, as he threaded his way through the underwood, and although the dogs hunted with silent tongues, they could be heard sweeping to and fro in hot and ardent pursuit. At length a hare, with ears erect, and one thrown back to catch the sounds which roused her from her form, cantered across the ride, and her large dark eye falling

upon Robin, although as mute and motionless as the tree against which he rested and screened himself, she stopped suddenly in her course as if undecided whether to proceed or retreat. A rustle through the dry leaves, however, proclaiming the enemy's approach, quickly dissipated the doubt, and springing forward she became entangled in the tangle, and a moment afterwards, laid dead at the mole-catcher's feet.

Now a nimble rabbit dashed heedlessly into the net and met the like fate and then a pheasant—the patriarch, perhaps, of the wood—stretched his long neck from a thicket, and after peering cautiously around ran forwards, and a moment afterwards flapped on the greensward in the last struggles of a broken neck. It was a cold, methodical slaughter, and before sun-set numbers fell in the like ruthless manner.

“What do we reckon?” inquired Pug.

“On the profits of a good day's work,” replied Robin.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Trust not those cunning waters of his eyes,
For villainy is not without such rheum;
And he, long traded in it, makes it seem
Like rivers of remorse and innocence.”

THE time-frictioned stool, so long occupied by Simon Slip, was now the seat of one Timothy Tubs. The new clerk met the description of the advertisement more than half way, wherein it was stated that, ‘a smart young man, willing to make himself generally useful, was in want of employment.’ For Timothy was as smart as circumstances would permit in every respect, from the

party coloured cravat, stiffened with a folded sheet of foolscap, down to the glossy bluchers. And as to that part of his qualification, asserting his willingness to perform any duty of a general nature, he was not only ready but always in a state of bustling excitement to do anything, from poking the fire to paring his nails. Timothy could not put on his hat, or draw on his cotton gloves, without shewing the mercurial tendency of his disposition. He did everything by jerks and starts, and was the direct opposite of what may be called 'a slow or heavy nature.'

It was a weakness of Timothy Tubs—and, perhaps, *the* weak point in his character—to persist in the hopeless endeavour to raise a pair of whiskers. In vain he lathered, shaved, and greased—in vain he looked, aye a dozen times a day, in the little triangular piece of looking glass kept for the especial purpose within his desk, for the appearance of the hoped-for-crop. Nothing

could be seen but the old established pimples.

“It ’s a most astounding coincidence,” observed Timothy, as he sat mounted on his stool examining his cheeks and chin in the little triangular piece of looking glass, and gently drawing the ends of his fingers over the parts, “a most astounding coincidence!” repeated he. “One would think a fellow like me”—and Timothy Tubs glanced at his turned-up nose, and thought it aquiline—“a fellow like me,” he repeated, “would grow whiskers without the smallest effort.”

He was still making a close inspection, when he became conscious that some one’s nose was being flattened against the ground glass door of the office, and that an eye peeped through a small hole in the corner of a fractured pane.

“Come in,” shouted Timothy, snapping up a pen, and driving it over a skin of parchment spread before him, “come in.”

To the second summons the door opened,

and the head of Jack Racket was thrust forward.

“Is 'Torney in?” said he, in a whisper.

“No, sir,” quickly replied Timothy. “We are out, sir.”

“Will he be back soon?” inquired Jack; but in such an altered tone and manner that even the clerk paused in his labour to assure himself, by a second examination, that it was ‘the noble scion of the house of Racket,’ standing before him.

“It 's impossible to say, sir,” rejoined Timothy. “We may return soon, or we may not. The circumstance at present lies in the bowels of the future.”

“Because,” continued Jack, “I want to speak a few words to you, Tubs, in what may be called strict confidence. You know what mum means?”

Timothy slid from his stool, lodged a pen behind an ear, and stretching his legs apart, said, “we of the legal profession, Mister Racket, know what 's what, or on the

other hand, if we don't know what's what, it is quite clear that the legal profession has members belonging to it, which the sooner they cease to be such, the sooner will the legal profession be without what may be advisedly called muffs. Now, most callings or occupations, however humble or of the inferior kind, sir, possess a mode of expression easiest for the conveyance of their respective ideas. We of the law, have *our* dictionary, and among the first words taught us, is the meaning and true intent of that invaluable one just mentioned by yourself, sir—mum.”

“And you know what chink means?” said Jack, shewing some guineas and jingling them together in the palm of his hand.

“Perfectly,” replied Timothy, drawing a long breath so as it almost whistled between his front teeth. “We of the legal profession, sir, understand that, too, in all its points and bearings, Mister Racket.”

“If I dare trust you,” said Jack, in a thick voice, and his face became a livid hue

as he spoke, "if I dare trust you," he repeated, "I could do you a turn—a good turn."

"You may, sir," returned Timothy, keeping his eyes fixed on the gold held temptingly before him. "We of the legal profession are —"

"To be bought," added Jack, "and I am willing to pay your own price."

"We can't want more than that, sir," said Timothy. "The price we set upon ourselves, is pretty sure not to be at a great discount."

"Take this," said Jack, offering the money with a shaking hand, "and listen to the dodge I want you to do for me."

Timothy Tubs took the money, and after making sure that it was safely deposited at the bottom of a pocket, signified his readiness for hearing the proposition.

"Provided you can bring this event off, handsome," continued Jack, "you shall have a cool hundred more."

"If within the compass of possibility,

Mister Racket," replied Timothy, "rest assured we will bring the event off pre-cisely in accordance with your desires. A cool hundred, sir," and he gasped as the amount named took his breath away, "is not to be netted every day in the week."

In deep black, with a starchless white cravat tied loosely round his throat, in the form of a wisp, Jack Racket bore a strong resemblance to a slovenly dressed and drooping undertaker, instead of the sporting, swaggering blade of other days. There was none of that noisy and boisterous spirit left which formed his prominent characteristic, and as he stood trembling, pale, and silent, he looked to be the coward that he felt.

"Did you," said he, after glancing suspiciously over his shoulders, "copy my guv'nor's last will—that one, I mean, in which he left me all but three thousand pounds?"

"Oh yes!" replied Timothy, briskly rub-

bing his hands and surveying his polished bluchers. "We engrossed it, sir, we engrossed it."

"Then there was a paper—a something to engross it from, wasn't there?" rejoined Jack, with such agony depicted in his face that the issue of life and death seemed to hang upon the answer.

"Certainly," said Timothy. "There was the draft of course."

"And where's that?" asked Jack, shaking from head to foot as if stricken with palsy.

"In the iron chest, sir, no doubt."

"Could you get it?" and Jack's teeth chattered as he spoke.

"There might be some little difficulty," replied Timothy, "if the lock was in its sound and proper order; but ——"

"It's broken," interrupted Jack, clasping his hands together, as if his heart exulted at the thought. "Say it's broken. Tell me that, Tubs. Say it's broken."

"Well!" added Timothy, "I was going

to explain that the bolt may be shot back by introducing a bent nail."

"Where is it?" cried Jack, almost at the pitch of his voice. "Give me the nail. A hundred pounds for the nail."

"Stay, stay," interposed Timothy, beginning to entertain a powerful impression that Jack had taken an abrupt leave of his senses. "That 's a large price for an old nail, Mister Racket. But before we proceed any further in this business, we must have a case, sir, a case on which we may offer our opinion and advice. We of the legal profession, sir, expect this under all circumstances before we act, or take any decided steps. Now Mister Racket," continued he, swelling with importance, "permit me to ask ——"

"Don't," interrupted Jack, nervously, "don't ask anything. It will take too much time. It will upon my soul."

"But my de—ar sir," returned Timothy, "how *are* we to arrive at a knowledge of facts unless it is by voluntary evidence, *viva*

voce, or through the medium of interrogatories?"

"I'll tell all that 's wanted," added Jack, in a faint, weak voice. "But remember what I said about—mum."

"*To* be sure," said Timothy. "Here," and he thumped his breast quickly with his clenched knuckles, "a secret is safer than if buried in the silent tomb. For occasionally the silent tomb, when opened, has revealed some very ugly secrets; but here, sir—" and again Timothy gave a double knock at his bosom—"here, Mister Racket, there's no opening, no digging, no shovelling."

"I must trust ye," said Jack, "but I'll make it worth your while not to throw me over—not to put me in the hole."

"It's a good, safe plan, sir," replied Timothy, gently running the tips of his fingers over the barren parts of his face. "None know better than we of the legal profession, that the best way to ensure a man's honesty, is to make it well worth his

while to abstain from acting the rascal. There's no sounder doctrine preached," continued he, "let who will be parson."

"If you'll make an exact copy of that will," said Jack, in a trembling, uncertain voice, as he again glanced suspiciously round the office, "so that it looks as much like the old one as a pea from the same pod, I'll come down straight with a cool handsome hundred."

"Where's the original?" asked Timothy, peering out of the corners of his small ferret-like eyes, as if he began to obtain an insight into the plan.

"Perhaps," replied Jack, as if he had just received a blow in his stomach—for his breath could scarcely be shorter—"perhaps," repeated he, "it can't be found just now. Things, you see, Tubs, don't turn up just when they're wanted, and I'm amazingly anxious to prove, and touch, and—all that sort of thing. You're down, ain't ye?"

"Hah!" ejaculated Timothy, with a serious

aspect, and who, if not 'down' in the comprehensive sense of the term at this moment, was determined to be so before long. "Hah ! but —"

"I know what you would say," added Jack. "Of course I 'm heir at law, everybody knows that. I should have all, you know, if there was no will. The heir at law grabs all you know, Tubs, doesn't he ? It's a great pull to be heir at law," continued he, with a violent struggle to make an effective swagger ; but such was the abject state of Jack Racket's nerves, that he rolled into a seat to save himself from measuring his length upon the floor.

"Certainly," rejoined Timothy, consulting the judicial and dusty portrait over the mantle shelf. And then, as if addressing the engraving of some departed pillar of the law, added ; "but it's one thing to *be* heir at law, and another thing to *prove* it. The child's a wise one who knows his own father."

"Oh, certainly," returned Jack, with a sickly smile; "exactly so, Tubs. You've hit the right pin, my bo-oy. I don't want the trouble and loss of time in proving my pedigree, and as the guv'nor *did* make a will, it would be nothing more than, what may be called, acting on the square, you see, to abide by it. I should like, beyond all manner of things, to perform the old gent's last—last what-do-ye-call-ems."

"In that case," said Timothy, running the point of his pen nimbly through the divisions of his teeth; "the will must be found."

"But it can't," whined Jack, with unshed tears swimming in his eyes; "don't I tell you it can't."

"Why not?" returned Timothy, again eyeing him as if to gimblet an opening into the secret; "why not?"

"Oh," said Jack, with a very wry countenance; "it's impossible always to give the exact why for everything. Accidents sometimes occur, don't they?"

"To be sure they do," replied Timothy; "but what was the particular accident which befel this will?"

"Burnt for all I know," returned Jack; "there, will that suit by way of a guess?"

"Burnt, eh?" added Timothy, tapping his forehead with a forefinger; "burnt, eh? Indeed."

"Who said so?" retorted Jack, passionately. "Who said it was burnt? I didn't, did I?"

"Oh no!" said Timothy, in a mysterious, tantalizing manner. "Certainly not, Mister Racket. You'd be the last to say such a thing, I'm sure."

"Well!" grumbled Jack, "no matter; it's gone, and that is enough for you to know."

"Quite," said Timothy, "quite enough, if not as much as we want, which, as you may have heard, Mister Racket, is always a little more than we ever get, sir. He, he! That's a singular coincidence is it not, Mister Racket, that as much as we want is always a little more, sir, than we ever get. He, he,

he!" and he rubbed his flabby, pasty looking hands together and appeared to enjoy the joke considerably.

"Now then," expostulated Jack, "don't come the funny style. I'm not in the humour, Tubs. I could dance a hornpipe on my head, better than stretch my mouth with a grin just now. I could, upon my soul."

"To bus'ness then," rejoined Timothy, suddenly becoming sedate. "We'll return to bus'ness. You require me," and his words dropped from his lips like peas from the sieve, "to forge a will. Isn't *that* the job, Mister Racket?"

"Forge!" repeated Jack, becoming deadly pale. "It can't be called forging, can it?"

"To make a counterfeit," said Timothy, "even if it be to the dotting of the I's, and crossing of the T's, like the original, would still be a forgery."

"The devil it would!" returned Jack. "But nobody will know it, Tubs," and he

patted Timothy on the back, in an encouraging manner; "nobody will know it my bo-oy. A hundred, remember; a cool hundred."

"Hah!" and again Timothy's breath whistled through his front teeth. "The finding out's the thing, sir, in this world. It isn't what we do, it isn't the picking the pocket, so to speak; but it's the hand being caught in the fact, that makes our noses curl at the thief."

"Never mind that," added Jack, impatiently; "we are not going to pick any pockets. And as to the will, why it's only making a fresh 'un, after all. Damn me if I can see any harm in that, Tubs."

"We don't all see through the same spectacles," returned Timothy; "the law occasionally takes a remarkably different view of things to what some people do."

"But you 'll pocket the dibs, Tubs," said Jack, coaxingly; "you 'll pocket the dibs, my bo-oy, won't ye?"

"I never felt the weight of a hundred guineas yet," observed Timothy, reflectively.

"You shall, my bo-oy, though," quickly added Jack; "you shall touch 'em to-morrow morning. Think o' that, Tubs—to-morrow morning. None o' your call again; no bit of stiff or I. O. U.; but the real stump-me-down, remember."

"The job 's worth the money," said Timothy; "well worth it."

"But not more, Tubs," replied Jack; "you can't say it 's worth a shilling more."

"We 'll not say so," rejoined Timothy; "whatever we may think, Mister Racket, it's as well, occasionally, not to express one's o-pinion."

"Come," added Jack; "what do you say if I make it fifty more, down on the nail?"

"In that case, sir," said Timothy; "my reply would be, liberality is sometimes the best economy."

"I'll do it," replied Jack; "there, won't you say I'm a game 'un now?"

“Ve-ry,” replied Timothy; “and what we should say, sir, in the phraseology of the cockpit, as game as a bantam.”

“Damn me,” said Jack, with a roll of his head; “I always was as game as a bantam. Some may crow,” continued he, “but this cock can fight, Tubs, this cock *can* fight,” and he jerked his hat, so as the front part of the brim almost concealed an eye, and swaggared about the office with perfect self-possession regained.

“In addition then—” and Timothy made the guineas gently chink in his pocket as he spoke, “I’m to have a hundred and fifty more upon handing over a perfect copy of the will you speak of?”

“You’ve hit the right pin, my bo-oy,” replied Jack. “That’s your time o’ day! Chink-wink ’em along.”

“When is it wanted?”

“To-morrow morning,” said Jack; “’Torney expects me to bring it to him by eleven, at latest.”

"We 'll be ready," rejoined Timothy; "never fear."

"Lord!" exclaimed Jack; "I know I shall play leap frog with every old woman I meet on my way home. I thought you'd take me out o' the scrape, Tubs; I always looked upon you as a thorough bred razor. That's your what's o' clock! no muffs, or own brothers and first cousins to the families of Flatman, Spoony, and the Greens, in this establishment. They can't live, sir, in this atmosphere. That's your time o' day! Chink-wink 'em along."

Soon after Jack's taking his departure, he folded his arms, and as his chin rested upon his breast he seemed to become buried in the deepest thought.

"Forgery is it?" said he; "well, if the worst comes to the worst, I didn't do it. If Tubs gets scragged that's his business, not mine. People can't expect to make pots of money without some pull against 'em. There's one precious comfort, however, he 'll never

split. No, no, Tubs," and he spoke as if addressing the object of his thought; "the fear of the hempen twist will choke all rising syllables. But Lord," cried he, striking himself with a frantic action, "what a fool I was—what a fool I was!"

CHAPTER IX.

“The crickets sing, and man’s o’er-labour’d sense
Repairs itself by rest.”

THE night was far advanced as a taper streamed from the latticed casement in the Grange, before which Rose and her mother had so often watched the sinking shades of twilight, and in this silent hour lady Warren sat for the last time ere her steps must be turned from the old home for ever. Neither by word nor look had she upbraided her son ; but when the hour came for her to learn the irremediable ruin which he had brought upon himself, her pale cheek only became more wan and her lips more bloodless. Her grief

was not for herself. She thought only of him, and Maud, and the poor who depended on her bounty.

Resting her brow upon a hand, she was reading a book—one which she had often turned from to kiss and bless her child now slumbering in the sunny corner of the churchyard—and so riveted was her attention upon the page before her, that she was unconscious of any one's approach, until a finger dropped lightly upon her arm.

"Mother," said a voice, causing her to start, "this is a late hour for your vigil. I thought you were asleep long since."

"Asleep, Edward!" she replied, raising her melancholy eyes.

"Aye," he rejoined, stooping and pressing a kiss upon her brow, "dreaming, I hoped, of happier hours."

"If I should live to see them," she returned, twining her fingers among his luxuriant curls, and smoothing them from his forehead, "if I should live to see happier

hours, Edward, they must, indeed, be winged on other pinions than those with which the past have been."

"True, dear mother," added he, "and may God forgive me! what have I not to answer for?"

"Nay, nay," said she, pressing him to her side, "you shall not say that. The fault of the parent is, too often, palpable only in the imprudence or thoughtlessness of the child; but if the cause be traced to the source from which it springs, the reproach belongs rather to the teacher than the taught."

"Do you not blame me then," inquired he, "not even now, when we are to turn our backs upon our home, and that, too, through my own single-handed recklessness?"

"No, no," was the reply. "Reproof, when too late, is but wanton cruelty."

"And yet, believe," added he, "that the rack itself would not equal the torture which I have suffered. Do not think that my heart is steeled against ——"

“No, no,” interrupted his mother, “hearts like thine, dear boy, are not harnessed in any such proof. I know,” she continued, “what must have been your sufferings, and—” she drew him yet closer—“I know, too well, what they must still be.”

“And yet with you, and such a wife, as Maud,” he answered almost gaily, “I think of looking misfortune in the face with absolute defiance.”

Lady Warren was about making a reply, when a light knock at the door of the apartment, occasioned both to cast a look of surprise towards that quarter.

“Come in,” cried Sir Edward.

“Your servant,” returned a well-known voice; and there stood Thomas Piper, in his own proper person, smoothing his silvery locks from his brow, and looking somewhat at a loss to account for his unexpected appearance.

“What, Tom!” exclaimed Sir Edward.
“How is this?”

“ You ’ll excuse me, my lady,” stammered Mister Piper, with a reverential bow after his own style, and if not quite so graceful as some styles, it was much more respectful than many, “ and *you* will excuse me also, Sir Edward,” continued Tom, turning to his master, “ but I ’ve taken the liberty of stepping up from the lodge to ——.” he could get no farther.

“ Yes,” said Sir Edward. “ Say what you wish, Tom, we shall be glad to hear anything you may have to communicate.”

“ Thank you, sir, and ditto the same to you, my lady,” rejoined Mister Piper. “ I ’m not much of a spokesman,” continued he, “ and from want of practice, I suppose, what I ’ve got to say feels a little too big,”—and he pressed a hand upon his breast—“ and seems to stick somewhere in this locality.”

Lady Warren looked at her old servant, and smiling said, “ Perhaps you have walked too fast and lost your breath.”

“ No, my lady,” replied Tom, shaking his

head, "it isn't want of wind. I know what that feeling is well," continued he, "more particularly, since that famous otter hunt we had, Sir Edward."

"Aye," rejoined his master, good humouredly, "you did not go well to hounds that day, Tom."

"Perhaps not, sir," returned Mister Piper. "It was struggling with difficulties I well remember, and although the cause be a different one, I feel now, as I did then, trying to do more than can well be accomplished."

"Do your best, Tom," added Sir Edward, "and let no time be lost, for it's getting late."

"Exactly so, sir," said Tom, "and I'll not keep ye waiting if so be my words don't choke me. You must know my lady," continued he, turning to his mistress, "I chanced to see the light from this window just as I was going to bed, and I thought it not unlikely I should never see it again. There

was a cold, damp feeling in'ards which told me so, and as an old servant—a very old servant, my lady—I hoped I might take the liberty of stepping up and saying, while there's time, what I'd been thinking about for some days past."

"Pray do," said his mistress. "We shall hear it with pleasure."

"Thank you, my lady," replied Tom, "and ditto the same to you, Sir Edward. You may have heard," continued he, "that if a man's bred and born in a coal-pit; eats, drinks, and sleeps, in a coal-pit; that to take him out of that coal-pit to live in a flowery mead would be a most disagreeable change. He'd pine for dust and darkness. In the same manner, if a barren rock, in the middle of the wide and tossing ocean is our home, we look upon that barren rock in a very different light to strangers. In books, in song, and story, we're told all this and a great deal more to the same purpose, which makes out that whatever we're most used

to, we most like. Now, the particular point I 'm heading for is this, my lady. I 've been used to your service—the service of this family—man and boy, all my life, and what is quite certain, if I 'm not to die, I must remain in it. In foreign parts,” said Tom, with a shaking chin, “I may not be particularly useful, or strikingly spicy; but I can do something. I can shave, for instance, as well as any barber, and—”

“Whip to a pack of foxhounds to perfection,” interrupted Sir Edward.

“You are good enough to say so, sir,” said Tom, raising a finger and touching a lock on his forehead; “but I don't suppose those benighted furreners know much about that duty. However,” continued he, “if you will but let me go with ye, I'll make myself useful and agreeable, as a ready hand and a silent tongue can make me; and if you don't, my lady,—” for Tom well knew the weakest point of attack—“I shall be like a stranded fish in less time than it takes a hot cinder to scorch the softest feather.”

“Indeed, Thomas,” replied Lady Warren, “it grieves me much to be compelled to refuse your kind and well-meant request. But for you to accompany us is impossible. Our means——”

“Means, my lady!” ejaculated old Tom. “You didn’t—I’m sure you didn’t—think I meant to be a burthen to you. No, no. Why heaven bless me, I don’t know what to do with *my* money! What with wages and capping, there it’s been rolling on for years and years, until I’m so rich that unless I spend a good deal with the benighted furren-ers, I may take to drinking, or something in that line of business.”

“Whatever you may have saved by your honest thrift,” rejoined his mistress, “you will find of the greatest service in the time of need. Your past life has been a blameless one, and as a faithful and good servant will ever be so remembered by us. I might, indeed, say more,” continued she, “but parting words are painful ones, and sink like cold pebbles in the heart.”

“ Oh, my lady !” groaned Tom, don ’t say they ’re parting ones. I can’t think—I can’t believe you ’ll leave me here to mope to death. I carried him,” and he pointed to his master, “on my shoulders, when a little boy, in many a run after a barn-yard fowl. We have fished together—I taught him—Master Ned, you know my lady, he was then—to cast a fly, shoulder a gun, handle a bat, bowl a ball, and ride his Shetland. It was *I* who helped him,” continued Tom, warming on his subject, “to do everything but learn his books, and my conscience tells me if they ’d been closer to his elbow on many occasions than myself, tare and tret, perhaps, might have proved much more profitable schoolmasters.”

“ No blame is due to you, Tom,” observed Sir Edward, smiling.

“ I ’ll be bold to say, and it gives me great relief so to acknowledge,” rejoined Mister Piper, “that there ’s a very great deal of blame belonging to my share, sir. Didn’t I

begin by keeping harriers on the sly, instead of beagles? And didn't I consent to riding to hounds unbeknown to my lady? To be sure I did," continued Tom, "and *as* a commencement what could be more criminal?"

"If that be so," returned his master, looking significantly at his mother, "the sooner I am quit of such bad tutorship the better."

"Ah, sir!" sighed Tom, "I'm speaking of by-gone times. You had no check-string when, perhaps, it was most wanted, and what I wish to be understood is, that I don't consider myself quite the faultless white lamb which my lady has been pleased to describe me."

"We will not carry this discussion any farther," said Lady Warren, rising from her chair. "It is already daylight and I have much to do. I cannot express," continued she, turning to old Tom, "how sad and sorrowful it makes me to be compelled to say, that your service with us must cease within a few hours. Good night, and may the blessing of

God be with you!" and so saying, she left the room with a hurried step.

It was a long and hearty parting grasp, which Sir Edward exchanged with old Tom. Neither spoke ; for their hearts were full.

CHAPTER X.

“O, what authority and show of truth,
Can cunning sin cover it withal!”

IN the “sweating-room,” as was the wont of Timothy Tubs to call his employer’s private office, and perhaps the title was not an inappropriate one, for many a man’s skin became extraordinarily unctious when undergoing the ordeal of a visit there; lawyer Sharp paced with quick and short steps, not unlike a restless animal in a cage. His brow was knitted and his lips fixed together, as of the ruling thoughts within pressed sorely in his patience. Now and then he examined the dial of his watch, which he jerked from

his pocket with an impatient gesture, and then, after marking the time, again commenced his nervous, uneasy gait.

At length a slight sound caught his ear, which acted with magical effect, and turning shortly upon his heel, he dropped himself in his usual seat, and drawing a hand over his face, seemed to take off a mask, for nothing could be more changed than his features, as Timothy Tubs appeared and announced, "Mister Racket."

"How do, 'Torney?" said Jack, following close upon the clerk's heels.

With a bland countenance, and soft, dropping words—so oily in their tone, that they floated as they fell, Mister Sharp begged to assure his excellent client that he never felt better in the whole course of his existence.

"Come, that 's right," rejoined Jack, gaining many degrees of confidence from the friendly and familiar way in which, for the first time, the lawyer addressed him ;

“of course,” continued he, striding upon a chair, and crossing his arms upon the back, “I ’m a little let down. It ’s natural I should be; but what must be, must, and all that sort o’ thing. Guv’nor had a famous innings.”

“We must all give place at last,” returned the lawyer, “to those whose right it is to succeed us.”

“My sentiments to the pip,” added Jack. “Upon my soul, ’Torney,” continued he, “we’re beginning business this morning, in a way which warms the cockles of my buzzum. Lead on.”

“Your father—”

“Was a deep ’un,” interrupted Jack; “and the closest fisted old file on this side the equator, I’ll bet the longest odds that ever were booked.”

“I was going to observe,” said Mister Sharp, in a manner which operated as a slight check to the effervescing spirits of the ‘scion of the noble house of Racket;’ “that

your father intrusted me with the entire management of his pecuniary matters, and if not always guided by my directions, invariably refrained from acting in opposition to them. Do I understand," and the lawyer closed his eyes, and nodded his head in a way which clearly signified that no other terms or conditions would be accepted, "that I am invested with the same discretionary powers by his heir?"

"You shall buckle 'em *to* your own way, 'Torney, so long as I can touch the tip free and easy," replied Jack; "from the blinkers to the breeching."

"I may also mention," said Mister Sharp, lifting his eyelids so as just to be capable of seeing the effect his words might produce, "that between lawyer and client, there should be no secrets, no reservation, no approach, however remote, to a want of confidence."

"No cross, eh?" returned Jack.

"With this understanding," continued

Mister Sharp, again taking a peep out of the chinks of his eyelids, "I shall feel much pleasure in taking the direction of affairs for my late client's son, as I did—satisfactorily I hope I may add—for himself and my own professional reputation."

"Make one little addition, 'Torney," said Jack, giving one of his most effective winks; "say for your own share in the plunder and pickings. Ha, ha, ha!"

"May I ask," rejoined Mister Sharp, suddenly becoming grave, "whether I am to consider myself your legal adviser on these conditions?"

"Who the devil do you think I'd have, 'Torney?" said Jack. "Isn't it you who knows every rope in the ship? You're a deep 'un!" added he; "may I be kicked to death by butterflies but you're a deep 'un!"

"You have brought the will with you, I suppose," observed the lawyer.

"Oh, yes, 'Torney," replied his client,

fumbling in a pocket of his coat ; “ certainly, here is the document.”

Mister Sharp, stretching out a hand to receive it, perceived an unusual tremor in Jack’s system, and his quick eye discovered, at the same moment, the pallid and deadly hue which was spreading itself over his countenance.

“ Are you unwell ? ” said the lawyer.

“ N— no,” replied his client, feverishly, “ not particularly so, ’Torney. I ’m not exactly fly do ye see,” and he rubbed his face roughly with both hands ; “ nor could I go in and win just at this moment. Perhaps,” continued he, as if a lucky thought had presented itself with the speed it was required, “ you never had a touch of the rumble-jumbles ? ”

Mister Sharp professed a total ignorance of the nature of the particular complaint described as the rumble-jumbles.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Jack, in piteous accents, as he placed a hand tenderly on his abdominal regions, “ it ’s as bad as the glanders, I

think, 'Torney, upon my soul! But I'm better now. Make play."

"Are you sufficiently recovered," said Mister Sharp, "for us to proceed to business?"

"Oh yes!" replied Jack. "Don't wait. Time's up.

"You are aware, perhaps," began the lawyer, gently fanning his features with the last will and testament purporting to be executed by John Racket, Esq., "you are aware, perhaps," repeated he, and he eyed his client keenly as he spoke, "that this is not worth the parchment on which it is written."

"Eh?" shouted Jack, with starting eyeballs. "What?"

"Be calm, compose yourself," rejoined Mister Sharp. "Remember, we are to be candid with each other, and I commence by telling you that I know this will to be no more your late father's than it is mine."

"Oh, 'Torney," exclaimed Jack, with a deeply-fetched groan, "what a deep un you are! How did ye find it out? Tubs

peached, eh? See how it is. Done by the Lord! If Tubs swings they can't scrag me, can they? You won't hang him, will ye? Go halves. We'll divide—aye, that's it. Share and share alike. Damn me, ain't I a generous one?" and he broke off, staring like an idiot.

As may readily be supposed, Mister Sharp listened in mute astonishment to this disjointed, wild, and unaccountable address, and he began to entertain the strongest suspicions, that the individual before him was a fit object for the immediate issue of the writ *de lunatico inquirendo*.

At length, after looking at each other in silence for some seconds, broken only by Jack's heavy and short breathing, Mister Sharp remarked, "This is very strange! What do you mean?"

"Halves," cried his client, "I'll give ye a clear half, and marry your daughter into the bargain. There, say no more about it, Torney. Ain't I a generous one?"

"You'll pardon me, sir," returned the

lawyer, with dignity; "but the present condition of your mind totally precludes my entering further on this business to day."

"Don't say that, 'Torney," gasped Jack. "Come to a settlement. If the pull's to be a dead weight against me, let's know it at once, there's a trump. Oh dear, oh dear!" cried he, "what a thing it is to be struck with the rumble-jumbles!"

Surprised beyond description at what he both saw and heard, the lawyer felt himself baffled in the tactics to be pursued. That there was some hidden cause for Jack's uncontrollable and abject terror, he could not entertain the shadow of a doubt, and that he was supposed to be cognizant of the mystery was also as self-evident. Reflecting upon the course to be adopted for drawing the truth, Mister Sharp folded his arms, and throwing himself back in his chair, fixed such a penetrating gaze upon his client, that he quailed and flinched under it.

"You knew then," at length said he,

“that it was under intimidation and threats, that your father was coerced into signing his last will?”

“Guv’nor told me so,” replied Jack, “just before he made a die of it.”

“He did, eh?” rejoined the lawyer, springing to his feet.

“Don’t,” returned Jack, holding out his hands; “don’t, ’Torney. You take my breath away. You do, upon my soul.”

After making two or three rapid turns up and down the office, Mister Sharp stood opposite his client and said, holding the document before Jack’s face, “if this was upset, you ’d not be worth a single shilling.

“I shall go off in a floo-id,” murmured Jack, “I shall melt like butter in the sun, if you talk in that way, ’Torney.”

“Your father, sir, was wayward,” rejoined the lawyer, without noticing the remark, “in all that related to his money. At one time he was disposed to leave you everything, at other times nothing.”

Jack groaned audibly.

"More than once," resumed the lawyer, "he resolved to leave you a mere pittance, and in a fit of anger—"

"I know all about it," interrupted Jack; worked to a pitch of frenzy. "What 's the use, 'Torney, of hanging me up, blistering my vitals, and splitting my windpipe in this style? Guv'nor cut me off, and then joined me on, just as the humour suited him. Make play and take us out o' the fire."

"You're eager to know what *is* to be, rather than what *has* been done?" said Mister Sharp, emphasising the tenses.

"Exactly so," replied his client. "You've hit the right rivet on the head at last, 'Torney."

"We must make terms—"

"Now you're talking like a sensible Christian," again interrupted Jack. "We're getting on the right road once more," continued he. "Ha, ha! Thought we should. Take a suck at the lemon and at him again! We'll

go halves. What do you say to half, 'Torney?"

While Jack was thus speaking with great volubility, Mister Sharp slowly unfolded the parchment, and as his eyes fell upon the contents, he appeared stricken dumb with wonder.

"What 's the matter?" exclaimed Jack, with new fears waking within him. "What 's the matter, 'Torney?"

"How 's this?" at length returned the lawyer, staring at the document before him without lifting his eyes from it. "How 's this?"

"How 's *what*?" cried his client. "I 'd rather be boiled alive, than kept simmering on in misery."

"Where did you get this?" asked Mister Sharp, and then, as if questioning the evidence of his senses, he seemed to be reading the document backwards, line by line, and word by word.

"Oh bother!" replied Jack, irritably

"You know well enough, and if you want more information, call for Tubs."

"It 's his writing," musingly observed the lawyer.

"To be sure it is," rejoined Jack.

"But there 's no signature."

"Then Tubs is a rascal of the blackest dye," added Jack, passionately. "That 's all I 've got to say about him. He promised to make the thing complete for the hundred and fifty, and I thought had, for I trusted to his honor. No matter, I 'll have the money back if I 've to take him by the heels and shake it out of his skin."

"Tell me—"

"Let 's have Tubs," added Jack; "he's got my money, and may spend it."

To the first shrill stroke of the little hand bell on the lawyer's table, Timothy Tubs appeared as if a spring had been touched.

"Sir," said Timothy, as the door closed upon his heels.

"What am I to understand by this?" re-

turned Mister Sharp, with a frowning and confused aspect, as he directed his clerk's attention to the parchment. "Can you give me any explanation?"

"De-cidely, sir," replied Timothy, his fingers roving instinctively to his sterile cheeks. "That 's an engrossed copy, sir, made by me, in accordance with Mister Racket's instructions, of his respectable and respected late progenitor's last will and testament."

"For what purpose?"

Timothy Tubs coughed dryly, and peeped out of the extreme corners of his eyes alternately at his employer and Jack; but said nothing.

"Well!" exclaimed Jack, with a peevish gesture; "if this isn't a nice little round game of rum-ti-tum with the froth *on*, I should wish to be informed what is! Real infant's play and nothing else! I give you my solemn word of honour, 'Torney," continued he, "I'm quite surprised at your weakness—quite."

“Permit me, sir,” rejoined the lawyer, coldly, “to sift this matter as I think proper.”

“Sift!” repeated Jack, as if weighing the word. “Take care you get nothing but chaff, ‘Torney.”

“I ask,” said Mister Sharp, addressing Timothy, in a stern tone and manner, “if you know for what purpose this copy was made?”

“To be used and proved in place of the original,” was the collected answer.

“Who told you so?”

Timothy pointed in silence to Jack.

“Was any reason assigned for substituting a copy?”

“Certainly, sir,” replied the clerk. “The original was lost—burnt, I expect.”

“Burnt, you expect,” sneered Jack. “I never said so, did I?”

“Stay,” returned the lawyer, authoritatively, “a moment more, and I have done. How did you get the draft?”

“By picking the lock of your iron safe,

sir," boldly replied Timothy; for he knew prevarication was useless.

"Enough," said Mister Sharp, waving a hand. "Leave the room."

"Shell out first, though," said Jack. "Hand back every mag I gave ye, before you go."

"No, sir," replied Timothy, firmly; "I earned that money."

"I deny it," thundered Jack. "Where's the guv'nor's name?"

"It was in its proper place," rejoined Timothy, "and a *fac simile* of the original; but I thought of my neck, Mister Racket, or the likelihood, at least, of a little quiet yachting at my country's expense. With this view, sir, I made the selection of putting it in pencil, and then, to prevent the possibility of any ugly mistake, took the liberty of rubbing it out."

"I'll not be swindled in this way," cried Jack, seizing Timothy by the throat; "give me my money."

"Quit your hold, madman!" hallooed the lawyer, catching Jack from his gripe, and sending him staggering into the farthest corner of the room. Then turning with equal fierceness upon Timothy, who looked as if anticipating instant extermination, he pointed to the door, and said in a manner which required no repetition of the mandate, "Begone, and never let me see you more."

"Come, 'Torney," said Jack, rubbing the extremities of his elbows, as if they had met with a rough reception against the wall. "This won't do at any price. I'm pretty good tempered, particularly when tackled with soo-perior weight; but I can't stand being baited in this kind o' way any longer. You've hurt my feelings, 'Torney," continued he, still rubbing his elbows, "you have upon my soul!"

"The will then is destroyed?" rejoined Mister Sharp, sinking into a chair, as if overcome with his feelings.

"Well!" returned Jack, in a tone of dis-

content, "I'll make no more gulps about it. "The will, 'Torney, wouldn't fill a pill-box with ashes."

A loud, harsh, and exulting laugh burst from the lawyer's lips. From room to room, and from floor to floor it was carried, until the whole house echoed with the sound to the very roof,

"Don't, 'Torney," cried Jack, exhibiting signs of unquestionable trepidation. "Don't frighten a chap. I'd rather hear ye scream like a cat in a trap, if I had my choice, than listen to such a laugh as that;" but before he had finished speaking, he saw the skirt of Mister Sharp's coat vanish, as if by magic, through the office door.

To Jack's unspeakable surprise he found himself alone.

CHAPTER XI.

“ If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men’s cottages princes’ palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions . I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may divine laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps over a cold decree: such a hare is madness the youth, to skip o’er the meshes of good council the cripple.”

UNLIKE the majority of sublunary matters with which life is rounded, no perceptible change was to be met with, in all pertaining to that famous hostelrie, the Duck and Gridiron. In the bright and sunny months, when ‘bees from flower to flower do hum,’ Luke Puffy leaned with folded

arms against the door post to watch the tide of human events both up and down the road ; and when the cold and sleety storms began, he betook himself to a snug corner in the bar window—the seasons round—this was the undeviating rule by which the landlord of the Duck and Gridiron was regulated.

“ You might go, sir,” observed Luke, to one of the two bagmen, who came to his house as regularly as the swallows to the eaves of the roof at given intervals ; “ you might go, sir, round the world, like Captain Cook, and then come back again the other way, you’d find Luke Puffy the same *statu quo*. I ’m a *statu quo*, sir, who has no more i-dea of moving, than the pyramids of Egypt. Folks talk of change,” said Luke, snapping a finger and thumb in derision ; “ but it ’s particularly rare, in my opinion, when they meet with a striking change for the better. Keep at home I say, and mind your own brewin’. It ’s a maxim, sir, and a

moral, which might be taught with a child's catechism—keep at home and mind your own brewin'. Them's my sentiments."

In this opinion, concerning the expediency of a stationary existence, Luke Puffy resolved, at least, to be consistent in practically supporting it.

The best parlour never bore a more cheerful appearance, although it seldom assumed a lesser one, when the hearth was well piled with a crackling faggot and logs, and the general arrangements had been under the landlord's immediate superintendence. Nothing that forethought could desire for ease and comfort, had been neglected or forgotten by Luke, and as he sat in his original seat in the centre of the screen, flanked by the choicest of his old friends and boon companions, his eyes roved to the little full-length martial portrait of himself over the mantelshelf, and he inwardly laughed to scorn the empty vanities of external grandeur.

"Ha!" ejaculated he, letting a thick cloud of smoke escape slowly from his lips; "what am I a-thinking about? What *am* I a-thinking about?"

"Well, neighbour," replied jovial Joe, sitting on his right hand; "if a man isn't the best judge of his own thoughts, he's like a—like a—like a—"

"Shovel without a handle," whispered Luke, for he was always ready to take the miller out of his difficulties.

"Shovel without a handle," mechanically repeated Joe.

"Don't get out of your depth again," returned Luke, in the same confidential tone; "it's dangerous."

"Come, Luke," said farmer Stockley; "give the company the benefit of your thoughts. I'll be bound something good may be gleaned from them."

The landlord knocked the ashes from the bowl of his pipe, and finding from the general lull in the conversation, that he was

expected to give publicity to his reflections, thus began :

“ I was a-thinking, for one’s thoughts will wander,” said he; “ that we ’re almost as much alike as oysters. Strip us of our skins, and the difference is so small that, between saints and sinners, there might be a great difficulty in finding out which was which.”

“ Good,” observed Frank Martin; “ good,” repeated he.

“ We differ a little in tastes,” continued Luke; “ and it’s providence we do, otherwise we should be all smelling at the same nosegay, but what one does for the screw of circumstances, another does under the same pressure. It’s all very well for those dillys of good men we read of sometimes, to turn up their eyes and noses at the break-downs of their fellow creetures, but put *them* to the pole, and let such fast coachmen as fear, pride, and, worst of all, necessity, handle the ribands, and then if they keep the coach steady, and turn the sharp corners without

coming to a crash, they *are* qualified to blow the key bugle. Ha!" sighed the landlord; "it's so particularly easy to talk about what should be done, and such a scrambling difficulty to shew the way how, as our respected friend Mister Piper observes."

"I've heard a great deal less said," remarked Robin, "in a considerable greater number of words spoken."

"Thank *you*, sir," rejoined Luke, placing his right hand on the left of his breast, and making a profound obeisance to the mole-catcher; "the smallest approbation most thankfully received."

"I should say," remarked the miller, "that such maxims, as we have just heard, ought to be printed. They deserve to be printed, Luke, in my opinion."

"They're merely, Joe," returned the landlord, "a small sample of what's here, sir," and he tapped his forehead with the air of a man in possession of a large stock on hand of the same material.

"Tom Piper is considerably behind time to-night," observed farmer Stockley, looking at his watch with an impatient gesture.

"He'll be here presently," replied Luke. "Give him breath; for I dare say he wants it."

"Have you heard any more particulars," said Frank Martin, "after lawyer Sharp—"

"Excuse me, Frank," interrupted the landlord, "you'll excuse *me*, I know. But the fact is, I've bottled up that story from beginning to end, as Mister Thomas Piper's own. I'll not have that tale told in the Duck and Gridiron, nor one tittle of a syllable mentioned concerning it, except by his lips. Ten thousand and one reports—if I counted rightly—have I heard this blessed day, and no two agreed in any one particular. Now exercise a little patience," continued he, "and we shall have the full account from an actual eye-witness of the facts as they happened."

"That's what I want," rejoined Robin.

“As to reports—” and the molecatcher blew the tips of his fingers in a way which clearly signified his entire want of faith in the pipe

“Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures ;
And of so easy, and so plain a stop,
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
The still-discordant wavering multitude,
Can play upon it.”

With a frisk, two skips, and a jump, a figure now burst into the room, and without going through the smallest ceremony of greeting any one present, began to exhibit considerable skill in the performance of a hornpipe.

Prepared, as all were, to meet Mr. Piper in a mood of no ordinary kind, not one expected that the exuberance of his animal spirits would take such a turn as this. In silent astonishment the spectators looked at old Tom's capers, cuts, and double shuffles, and it was not until Luke Puffy began to fear that his friend's wits were on the tip-toe of departure, that he ventured to make the experiment of putting a wholesome check upon them.

“Tom,” said Luke, reprovingly, “we’ve seen a dancing bear before, thank *you*, sir, all the same; but at the same time I’m deputed by the present and honorable company to return their best thanks for this gratooitous exhibition.”

The satire was sharp and biting, perhaps, but it took no effect whatever upon Tom Piper, who continued his hornpipe with increased energy.

“He’s gone,” whispered farmer Stockley. “He’s as mad as a March hare.”

“Not he,” rejoined jovial Joe, “he only wants went. Let him alone and he’ll work himself as easy as an old stocking. He only wants went, I tell ye.”

“There!” hallooed Tom, as he came to a standstill, after one of the most remarkable double shuffles for its length and nimbleness, perhaps, that was ever witnessed, by as antiquated a pair of feet, “what do you think o’ that for three score, ten an’ two?”

“If you refer to me for an opinion, Thomas

Piper," replied the landlord, in a sententious tone, "I should say the late gratooitous exhibition was anything but a sensible one for three score, ten an' two. That's all, sir, nothing more."

"It was only to give himself went," observed the miller.

"Truer words were never spoken, Joe," gasped old Tom, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow and glowing cheeks. "If I hadn't got a little ease in some way or other, my belief is I must have cracked my boiler. Think of that, my jolly companions every one; think what a serious fracture it would be for a man to crack his boiler;" and then placing his hands to his sides, Tom laughed so long and broadly, that his features bore a striking resemblance to that figure of fun, Toby Philpot.

"I told ye, he wanted went," said the miller, as if he deserved a compliment for his penetration, and ought to be paid at sight.

"Having cooled off," remarked Luke

Puffy, "perhaps you 'll take your usual seat among us. It 's been airing for you some hours, Thomas."

As if still in doubt as to old Tom's sanity, the landlord kept a steady look upon him, as he dropped himself between the elbows in the screen, and had any fresh symptoms been developed, it is far from being particularly doubtful whether he would not have exercised coercive measures without further loss of time.

Fortunately, however, Thomas Piper became by degrees as calm as could be desired, even by Luke himself, and except a grin, which seemed to have been lately stereotyped upon his features, no great or alarming change was perceptible in him. To the satisfaction of all, but more especially to Luke, he filled his glass methodically from the fragrant and steaming bowl before him, hob-an'-nobbed with his friends right and left, wished universal happiness to the universal family of man, drained the last drop

to his own sentiment, and acted generally and particularly the part of old Tom Piper of yore.

“I promised our worthy host,” said he, “that I’d be here somewhat earlier, but we can’t do always as we say we’ll do, in this world, which may account for a considerable number of chipped, starr’d, and broken promises. However,” continued he, “here I am, to relieve your minds with the balsam of delight, and make your hearts rise in your buzzums like cork shavings.”

A breathless silence ensued, and the interest felt by all present was manifest in their eager and riveted looks.

“There’s no occasion for me,” began Tom, “to tell you what you already know. He’s a dull tale bearer who does that, sirs; but I’ll just drop into that part of my history which you’ll pick up like hens in a pea-field. The night before they were to leave, and after a little coaxing,” continued he, “I persuaded Sir Edward to let me go

with him and my lady the first stage, and it was settled I was to be at the Grange the following morning to assist in packing the carriage, and doing any other little odd jobs which, if my heart didn't fail, I might be able to manage. It was dull, heavy work you 'll believe, and nothing could be slower than the way in which everything progressed; but at last the post boy was in his saddle, and I stood with my hat off as my lady appeared in the porch, leaning on Sir Edward's arm. If I live to be a hundred and fifty years old, which I don't expect, I shall never forget the feelings I had here," and Tom passed a hand down the front part of his person, extending over a considerable portion of the surface, "when I saw her turn to take a look—perhaps it was the last she intended to give—at the door as it closed upon them, a dozzleishness came over me, and my head went round like a tee-totum. Just at this moment, and as if they had risen from the ground, who should stand

between them and the carriage but lawyer Sharp and his daughter. For a short time it was my belief that my eyes deceived me, and I was labouring under a sort of morning nightmare; but when I saw Miss Maud make a fly into my lady's arms, and with a mixture of laughing, crying, screaming, and shivering, cry out, "We 've wronged him, indeed we have! He 'll tell you all! Oh, God, have mercy on me!" and sink on the earth with no more colour in her cheeks than in a snowdrift, I began to think this was something more than dreaming. Before, however, there was time to think twice, Sir Edward had her in his arms with the tenderness he 'd carry a new-born baby, and hurried into the house. Scarcely knowing what I did, I found myself following closely on his heels, and was ordered to fetch some water with a little more haste than what may be called convenient dispatch. Upon my return to the library, where Miss Maud had been placed on the sofa, I found her so

far recovered from the fainting fit, as to be talking as fast as a lady can only talk when she's particularly well acquainted with her subject. How her little tongue rattled on, to be sure ! First she turned to Sir Edward, then she turned to my lady, and seemed to make little diversions for the purpose of getting breath, I suppose, by kissing the cheeks of her father, who sat close by her side, until they must have tingled again."

"But what did she say?" inquired Luke Puffy. "That's what *I* want to get at."

"Some things are too quick for the eyes," replied Tom; "and other things too quick for the ears. Now I'm free to confess," continued he, "although I heard a perfect volley of words, scarcely one but might as well have been spoken in Hebrew, Latin, or Greek, and unless I possessed a natural good notion of guessing the rights of things, by putting this and that together, I might be as far off the facts as ever."

"But what did Sir Edward or Lady Warren say?" asked farmer Stockley.

"As little as it was possible for people under any circumstances," returned Tom, "for they said nothing. They stood looking at each other as if tongue-tied, and alabaster was never whiter than their cheeks, I do assure ye."

"If they were so amazingly dumb," said Luke Puffy, "I'll be answerable the lawyer found a tongue. A lawyer," continued the landlord, "can always speak, at all times, upon all subjects."

"As a rule you may be right, Luke" replied Mr. Piper, in a way which left the impression that he still considered there were two sides to that question. "But upon this occasion, lawyer Sharp was as silent as my lady and Sir Edward."

"Then if nobody said nothing—or which amounts to nothing, which is all the same thing," observed the landlord, "how are we to arrive at anything like an acquaintance

with the truth? That 's what *I* should like to know, sirs," said Luke, appealing to the circle.

"Let him alone," returned jovial Joe; "he 'll give it went presently. He only wants time to give it went."

"He can't inform us of more than he knows," remarked Frank Martin, who felt that his friend stood at this juncture in need of support. "A man can only give what he 's got to give."

"Don't be impatient, boys," cried old Tom, "don't be impatient! You shall arrive at the end by degrees. Keep your ears open, for here goes again. Talk of the powers of speaking," continued he, "I never heard a tongue run so glibly, as Miss Maud's, in my life before. It rattled on at such a pace that I began to think it was never coming to a check; but at last her voice, from a high pitch, began to grow fainter and fainter, and winding up with something which sounded like a little prayer, she dropped her face upon

her father's shirt front, and remained there panting like a beaten hare."

Luke Puffy was about making another ill-timed observation, when he was stopped by the miller's whispering a few words upon the inexpediency of interrupting a man when he was giving himself "went."

"After this," resumed Tom Piper, "there was a kind of impulse on everybody's part to shake hands with everybody, and the squeeze which Sir Edward gave these delicate and calico fingers—" here he exhibited one of the reddest, hardest, and most horny of hands,—“when he told me with sunshine all over his face, that my services would not be required for the first stage, just then, and it was particularly uncertain when they would, I shall remember to the last hour of my life. And this, gentlemen," said old Tom, "is all I either saw or heard of the mysterious doings at the Grange, between sun-rise and sun-set, yesterday."

"I beg to propose," said Joseph Beans,

starting to his feet with enthusiasm, "nine cheers. Take the time from me," he continued, holding a glass above his head.

"Stay, stay," replied Luke, "let's know what we're going to hooray about."

"Then let this be our excuse for the ringing cheers," added old Tom, "our own happiness for the joys of others."

"A better could not be," said the landlord; but before we give them, let me ask one question:—what's your conclusion—the tail end if I may so call it—of all these marvels, Tom?"

"That lawyer Sharp's been Sir Edward's best friend," replied old Tom, in a decided, unhesitating tone, "when he appeared his greatest enemy."

The effect occasioned by these few words was electrical, and it is a great question how many hurrahs followed their delivery; but nothing can be a greater certainty than the number proposed by the miller, was exceeded by many a vociferous shout.

It was long after the hour prescribed by act of parliament before the festive party beneath the roof of the Duck and Gridiron received positive orders from Luke Puffy to disperse. At length, entertaining a thick, misty notion that he was subjecting himself to pain and penalties, for keeping open house when the lark was preparing to shake the dew-drops from her wings, he rose from his seat with a majestic air, and steadying himself with an effort from dropping backwards into his seat, hiccoughed a word which sounded not unlike, "Mizzle."

CHAPTER XII.

“Some strange commotion
Is in his brain.”

JACK Racket looked both flat and gloomy, as he lounged in a listless posture in the old arm chair so long occupied by his late father, and the careless and neglected condition of his toilet bore evidence of the present depressed state of his spirits. Although it was early, and the untasted breakfast still remained upon the table, a steaming glass of brandy and water stood close to his elbow, which from time to time he sipped, with the air of one driven to this last extremity for consolation.

“ Must screw myself up to the mark before 'Torney comes,” said he, emptying the glass. “ It will never do to be found down on my luck in this style, and perhaps, after all, there's no occasion I should be; but when my honoured parent comes to know the prank I played with that bit of parchment—and know it she must—there'll be as nice a little shindy, as the most pugnaciously inclined could desire to see. How the old faggot will blaze away to be sure! ”

The person so flatteringly described as “ the old faggot,” now entered the room, closely followed by lawyer Sharp.

“ Oh, 'Torney!” exclaimed Jack, greatly assisted in the freedom of speech and manner, by the quantity of brandy and water which he had swallowed. “ How are ye, my daffidowndilly? Didn't expect you for an hour or two.”

“ It's somewhat earlier than the time appointed, sir,” replied the lawyer stiffly; “ but

our business is pressing, and brooks of as little delay as possible."

"Then why the devil," rejoined Jack, "did you bolt from me yesterday morning, and—" "you 'll excuse me," he continued, breaking off the sentence, and addressing his mother, "you 'll excuse me, Miss Elizabeth, but our matters, just now, are of a private nature."

Without making any answer to this address, she drew a chair from the wall, and took her seat.

"I didn't make myself clearly understood, perhaps, ma'am," added Jack, "but if you 'll take yourself on the other side of that door," continued he, pointing to the one leading from the apartment, "and shut it close, you 'll confer an everlastin' favour upon your most obedient and humble servant to command, ma'am."

"I shall remain here, John Racket," replied she, firmly, "and with as good a right as yourself."

"In that case, 'Torney," rejoined Jack, "we must transplant ourselves elsewhere."

"I want to see, hear, and know of nothing," added his mother, "but what concerns myself. Satisfy me as far as I am concerned, and I'll not let you ask twice for my riddance."

"Your mother, sir—" began the lawyer.

"What?" cried Jack, jumping from his seat. "Did you know, 'Torney, that she was my honoured parent?"

"From the day of her being so," was the collected answer.

"What a deep 'un you are, 'Torney!" exclaimed Jack. "Why the deuce didn't you let me into the secret? But perhaps you were a little delicate in letting a chap know he came of such a melancholy cross," and he shook his head in a desponding manner.

"I was about observing," returned Mr. Sharp, without noticing Jack's cause of lamentation, "that your mother, sir, had

better remain, and hear all that passes between us."

"Very good," said Jack, surlily; "I don't care. Fire away."

"Not long before my late client's death," began Mr. Sharp, directing his remarks more particularly to Jack's mother, "he made a will under your dictation. I use that word," continued he, "in preference to a stronger one, which might be applied."

"That's right," observed Jack, approvingly, "draw it mild, 'Torney."

She looked at the lawyer with a steady, unflinching gaze, but said nothing.

"And before making that will," resumed Mr. Sharp, deliberately, "there were others in existence, in which his property was bequeathed in accordance with the fitful moods of suspicion or distrust which governed him at the moment."

Elizabeth Grudgeall nodded an assent to this statement.

"Contemplating the probability," conti-

nued he, "and I may say, in the full belief of the certainty of his son's marriage with my daughter, and fearful that any of his property might be wasted if left—"

"To my tender care," added Jack. "The gov'nor always had a strange notion of what his son would do with the mopuses, when he fingered 'em."

"You anticipate what I would say in other words, sir," returned Mr. Sharp.

"Nothing like piloting your friends," said Jack. "Move along; can't bear the slows."

"I was about stating," recommenced the lawyer, "that actuated by these motives, my late client made and executed a will, in which he bequeathed the whole of his real and personal estate, unconditionally to my daughter."

"Not *unconditionally*," replied Jack's mother, with a cunning leer. "It was left in trust, and provided the marriage took place."

“In that particular, and it is a most important one,” rejoined Mr. Sharp, “you are mistaken.”

“Well, well!” added she, indifferently, “such were his directions for its framing, or my ears deceived me.”

“No matter,” said Jack, with symptoms of declining patience. “Go on, ’Torney. What ’s the use of making a mouthful of a pea? As to that part o’ the business,—the marriage I mean,—I shall be coupled to the little filly in due course. Rattle away, my pink o’ toolips!”

“Whatever may have been done,” returned Jack’s mother, stretching out the fingers of her right hand clutchingly, as she hissed her words between her teeth, “and whatever may have been undone,” continued she, “I have little to do. None thought of me but myself, and by myself none were thought of. Give that which his dying hand had not power to rob me of;—it ’s all I ask.”

“ Make it a small annooity,” replied Jack, “ and I ’m ready as a hair-set trigger ; but, taking even a pinch from those pleasant little money-bags, would give me a serious attack of the willy-wabbles. I should never survive it, my honor’d parent.”

“ It would be easy to prolong this discussion,” said the lawyer, “ to a length as tedious as it would be futile ; but the interests of none concerned,—and I ’ll speak of those alone at this moment,—would not be advanced by procrastination. We stand, I suppose, upon our legal and equitable rights?”

“ Of course we do,” replied Jack, emptying his fourth glass, with a hiccough ; “ upon our sinful and what-you-may-call-’em rights, an’ no mistake. Move a-head, ’Torney.”

“ I see, I see !” quickly ejaculated the beldam, and her eyes darted forth the venom of a snake’s, as she spoke. “ In those words there ’s something more than meets the sight. What do you mean?”

“ I ’ll answer that particular free-an’-easy style of cross examination, ’Torney,” replied Jack, “ if so be you ’ll give me leave. Pole ’em up a couple of links shorter, and we ’ll run down the slope as free as soaped lightning. Now, you must know, my honored parent,” continued he, “ for none can be better informed upon the subject than yourself, that the Guv’nor intended to cut you out o’ the fat altogether, just before he became a stiff ’un. As a dootiful son, therefore, as I always have been, you could witness on your oath,” said he, with a succession of winks, “ I couldn’t paw-sibly refuse handing him that will out of the iron box, at his urgent request, soon after you quitted the room, together with the candle you may remember leaving behind ye.”

“ The candle I may remember leaving behind me ! ” repeated she, as if weighing each word as it dropped from her tongue.

“ Aye,” returned Jack, “ and singular to

relate, he no sooner got hold of both, than with a very cheerful countenance, he began roasting the bit of parchment, until it cracked and crumbled into tinder between his fingers."

Rising slowly from her chair, and pointing a finger at her son, the beldam stood glaring at him with fury too great for utterance. Her features bore a livid hue, and, with passion in every lineament, she looked like a demon of rage and hatred just let loose from hell.

"Come, Miss Elizabeth," said he, entertaining fears that he might be visited by some active demonstration of her violence, "don't look at a chap in that ferocious style. Upon my soul! you put one in mind of a cannibal just filing his teeth to an edge before making a meal of a Christian. I couldn't help the old gent," continued he, in a tone of justification, "from doing what he liked with his own, could I?"

"And do you tell me," at length she

uttered, in a choking voice, "do you tell me this lie, thinking I shall believe it?"

"You can please yourself, my honor'd parent," replied he, "about believing me or not. I don't care a dump, and never did, whether folks believe what I say or otherwise. It's all the same to Jack Racket, Esquire."

"'Twas you," rejoined she, "who did this—'twas you, John Racket; but the deed shall recoil upon the doer. He," and she turned with a fierce gesture towards the lawyer, "will make you rue the hour you put yourself within his spider's web."

"Don't let that cause any particular anxiety on your part, my honor'd parent," returned he, trying to put on a look of indifference; but the observation made him wince as if a goad had pricked him. "'Torney and I understand each other perfectly. We run in couples, we do, and if you'll confer upon us the favour of smoothing down your

hackles, and keeping them close, we shall be found two generous gents."

"John Racket," said his mother, and she still kept her finger pointed towards him, "like many a wiser man, you have overreached yourself. In trying to grasp all, you 've lost all, and he," she turned her pointed finger to the lawyer, "will be honest enough to tell ye so."

Jack's eyes turned involuntarily upon Mr. Sharp, and he felt his limbs shake as if with an ague fit.

"It 's no policy of mine to disguise anything now," said the lawyer.

"You hear him," returned she; "you hear him, John Racket. It's no policy of his to disguise anything now."

Jack's hair felt as if each began to stiffen and stand on end.

"The last will having been destroyed, as we learn, by the testator's own hand," continued Mr. Sharp, throwing himself back in the chair, "the one made preceding it

must, of course, be proved and acted upon."

"You hear him, John Racket," repeated his mother; "you hear him."

"And where 's that?" inquired Jack.

"In my possession," replied Mr. Sharp.

"Especial caution was taken, I 'll be bound," said the beldam, scowling upon the lawyer, "that there were no tricks played with that will."

"Don't be so liberal with your pleasant remarks, Miss Elizabeth," returned Jack. "What he says is right enough, and straight for'ard as the crow flies or I ride. The guv'nor," continued he, "set his heart upon my being spliced to 'Torney's little doll of a daughter, and I set my heart upon it, and 'Torney set his heart upon it, and to make all things pleasant to all parties, I 'm ready to carry out the plan. There's enough for all to have a liberal cut o' the puddin', and where there's no cause to grumble, there should be no grumbling. It may be quite

as well, if not a few shades better, that the tin should be tied up tight and close on the fee-male, as then if anything goes wrong with me, and I take the benefit of the act, the rascals of creditors won't be able to touch my property, eh, 'Torney?"

The lawyer made no reply; but remained motionless and thoughtful in his chair.

Construing this silence to be a favourable reception of his views, Jack began to feel that the fears which crept over him were groundless, and his assurance returned with great force.

"I won't say," observed he, "but what I should be better pleased to handle some of the mopuses myself; and perhaps, 'Torney," continued he, "you'll just mention this to my wife that is to be."

"Your wife!" ejaculated his mother. "Tell him," said she, turning to the lawyer, with a sneer, "whether your daughter will become *his* wife."

"Never," replied Mr. Sharp.

"Eh, cried Jack," "not my wife?"

"No, sir," returned the lawyer. "She herself, would rather be clasped in the arms of death than in yours, and I—her father—would sooner see her in them."

"You hear him, John Racket," said his mother, "you hear him."

Yes, he heard; but the words stunned him, and he sat stretching his eyelids like a man stricken with horror and amazement.

"Listen," said Mr. Sharp, "and let all doubt and mystery henceforth cease between us. It was a project of your father's, and your own, to unite yourself to my daughter, and I apparently fostered the design. My object in doing this was to obtain the disposal of his property in her favour, so that through her, an act of justice might be rendered to the victim of your united craft and cunning, Sir Edward Warren."

"Victim of our craft and cunning!" repeated Jack, dropping his lower jaw.

"Aye," rejoined the lawyer, "yours, not

mine. It's true," continued he, "that I appeared as deeply in the plot as yourselves; but the helpless position of my ward, through his father's thoughtless extravagance and his own, and the determined hostility evinced by him to all my behests for a stringent regard to economy, rendered such a course indispensable. The difficulties were so overwhelming, that had I attempted to stem the current by other means, ruin—irretrievable and complete—must have been his portion. To prevent this—to fence each blow levelled for his destruction—has been the object of my life, to be attained at the sacrifice of all sense and feeling. I cared nothing that was thought, nothing that was said, nothing that was done, when opposed to this concentrated end. And that end has been attained."

"You hear him, John Racket," added his mother, with a hoarse laugh, "you hear him."

"Many of the securities obtained by usury and fraud," resumed the lawyer, without

noticing the interruption by either look or gesture, "I got into my own hands, but such were the sweeping measures taken for stripping the last remnant of property from him, whom you marked as a sacrifice to your wretched wiles, that nothing short of a seeming connivance with the entire plan would have led to its frustration. This part I acted, and that, too, effectually."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack's mother.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I did not—could not—" continued Mr. Sharp, "anticipate that the will extorted by intimidation, and which led me to think that the principal springs of my plot were broken would be destroyed; but—" and the lawyer measured each syllable as it fell—
"I relied upon being able to work upon your fears in making a favourable compromise. The total want of consideration for the principal part of the securities obtained, the illegitimacy of your birth, and the doubtful construction of which even the last bequest

was capable, led me to believe such a hope was not without foundation."

Jack continued his fixed and glassy eyes upon the speaker, but no observation escaped his lips.

"Your father, sir," resumed the lawyer, "was not a man to be turned from his purpose by either pity, remorse, or fear. His plans for possessing himself of the Warren property began many long, long years ago; and to oppose them by me, commenced at the moment of my knowing what they were. Had, however, his suspicions been awakened by the smallest hesitation on my part to share in the nefarious proceedings, his end would have been accomplished, and mine frustrated. I, therefore, permitted myself to be thought and called a villain, in order that, through my apparent baseness, I might be able to shield him in secret, who I had not the power of openly protecting."

"You hear him, John Racket," repeated his mother, in the same mocking tone.

“Ha, ha, ha! What would you give now for the will extorted by my threats?”

Jack spoke not; but kept his blinkless eyes upon Mr. Sharp, while his features gradually turned to the bilious shade of saffron.

“I have now nothing more to add,” said the lawyer. “Neither legally nor equitably are you entitled to one farthing. The poor attempt to substitute a forgery for the document now affirmed to have been destroyed by the testator’s own hands, leads me to suspect—”

“That I told him he was a bastard,” interrupted the beldam, “after the fool had burned it. There’s no occasion for suspicions, lawyer Sharp, in these honest moments of our lives.”

As if satisfied with this explanation, Mr. Sharp rose in silence from his chair, preparatory to taking his departure.

“Oh, ’Torney!” exclaimed Jack, throwing himself forward on his knees, and holding up his hands in a beseeching attitude, “say

you're not in earnest—say you're only in joke. Don't," continued he, while the tears coursed down his cheeks in perfect streams, "don't frighten a poor chap in this way, 'Torney. I wouldn't serve you so, upon my soul! Think of my feelins, 'Torney! think of my feelins, and take pity upon a miserable kid."

"It's far from my inclination," replied the lawyer, "to make the smallest addition to your wretchedness, and I have said nothing more than I considered necessary for explaining the motives by which my own conduct has been governed, in connexion with your foiled hopes and defeated machinations. Sir Edward Warren," continued he, "instead of being the stripped outcast which you would have made him with but little compunction, will now be put in possession of his rights again, and you, who spread the net for his destruction, have fallen into the meshes yourself. It is by no means, sir, an unusual instance of blind and grasping cupidity."

"Oh!" groaned Jack, "Oh, oh, oh!" and he fairly blubbered like a beaten child.

"Come," said his mother, in a harsh, reproving tone, "tears are of no avail. I have tried what they would do in many a bout with misery; but never found them answer. Stand on your feet, man, if you are one," continued she; "knees were not made for kneeling on."

With a disconsolate whine, Jack dragged himself from the ground, choking with sobs and bathed in tears.

"Tell me, 'Torney," said he "tell me if I may hope for a few crumbs and pickings? Guv'nor's dibs were not all made out o' the old and young Warrens, and it would be a dead robbery to keep from his offspring that which never belonged to 'em."

"That is not a question for my decision," replied Mr. Sharp.

"Never expected this from you, 'Torney," sobbed Jack. "Thought you a brick-wall of a friend. Oh dear me," he exclaimed,

with a long-drawn and deeply-fetched sigh,
“how a fellow may be flung from the saddle
of luck when he thinks his seat nobby!”

Without further remark the lawyer took
his leave, and soon after Jack Racket was
left to chew the bitter cud of his misfortunes
in solitude.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Why, then 'tis none to you : for there is nothing,
Either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

THE old scythe bearer, the sure and close mower of bud and blossom, had dealt with a lenient hand upon that full-blown rose, Dame Stockley. For it cannot be denied that her charms were full-blown, albeit not a seared and yellow leaf had, as yet, dropped from the nosegay. The dimples, perhaps, in her fat and chubby cheeks, might not be so marked and indented as in the days that she went gipsying ; but there was not one which had given place to the crow's foot of Time or care—a wrinkle. The ringlets which once hung down her cheeks like the tendrils of a hop vine, were

now smoothed upon her brow in two plain bands, slightly frosted here and there. But the Dame was as brisk as ever, and sung as much, and enjoyed her annual visit to Tare-Down races with the same unbounded pleasure, and made the farmer toe the mark, in all becoming and attentive conduct towards her, and scolded the servants—particularly that plump dairy maid, with the skyblue eyes and red lips, who never could be cured from loitering with Saul, the strapping cow-boy, of some twenty summers' growth, and whose boast was, that he stood six feet one without his stockings—with a freshness of delight which proved an uninterrupted source of the highest gratification. She never flagged with any of these important matters; but as years rolled on, seemed rather to gather strength for the due performance of them than otherwise.

As blithe as any soaring lark in the summer's sun, the dame both looked and felt one morning, as her nimble fingers were

occupied in decking a bonnet of unusual splendour. The ribands, which were being thickly studded over it in bows, festoons, and streamers, were not a shade less bright than the apple blossom, and as, from time to time she tried the effect of this dazzling head-gear in a looking-glass opposite, which, from its antique frame, and general primitive appearance, must have been fabricated in some very remote age, the dame expressed decided satisfaction at the progressive result of her labours.

That old looking-glass, in which so often had been seen gay and happy faces, what tales of change and sadness might it tell? The young and beautiful—those who think of neither pain, nor sorrow—often had had their laughter-loving features reflected there, and then, as from morning to the coming night, they looked again, and there was crook-backed age, wrinkled with grief and misery. Oh! but the old looking-glass had a tale to tell of smiles and tears!

“ Really,” observed the dame, placing the apple-blossom ribands in a favourable light and focus for inspection, “ with my new bod-dice and farthingale, I shall look more like a bride myself than anything else.”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ” laughed some one close to the dame’s readiest ear, and the tone was so strong and hearty, that it operated on her nerves with a most startling effect.

With a look of mingled mortification and anger, she turned to discover who the trespasser upon her privacy might be, and there stood farmer Stockley, with the broadest of broad grins upon his countenance, and holding his sides, as if a volcano of mirth had made an irruption upon the grandest scale.

“ Ha, ha, ha,” roared he. “ Ha, ha, ha ! And so with your new boddice and farthingale, you ’ll look more like a bride yourself, than anything else, eh ? Ha, ha, ha ! ”

As may be readily supposed, the dame

had not the remotest intention of being overheard by any one, and upon finding the offending listener was an object upon whom the vials of her wrath might be poured with impunity, she proceeded to uncork them without further loss of time.

“It well becomes you, Mister Stockley,” began she, with a certain toss of the head, which was as certain an index of the coming domestic storm as the low moaning of the wind, distant thunder, and the horizon streaked with the forked lightning’s flash, proclaim the coming strife of warring elements. “It well becomes you, sir,” repeated she, suddenly dropping the apple-blossom ribands in her lap, as if parting company at a moment’s notice with the satisfactory thoughts and pleasant ideas with which they were associated, “to turn the partner of your bosom into ridicule. It’s like you men, all over. Yes, if by any little act of meanness you pick up a word by which the partners of your bosoms can be made

the butts of your coarse jokes and jests, how prompt you all are to make them wish they had bitten their tongues off. Ganders are not more ready to hiss, or pigs to grunt, than husbands to find fault and laugh at the partners of their bosoms. But there was a time, Mister Stockley," and she spoke in a caustic and cutting tone of irony, "when you would sooner have shaved the tip of your nose from your countenance than let fall a syllable about my boddice and farthingale, except to praise the shape for which they were made. Oh, but you know it well! And now you can stand there with a liberal half of your head grinning at what your shins would have rattled for in your boots, like flagelets, before I was chicky-biddy'd by a weak delusion into the handcuffs and manacles of matrimony. I remember, and you may, too, sir, if you 've courage enough to turn back to a few of the darkest pages of your history, when a bonnet similar to this——"

“Thirty-three years ago, dame,” interrupted the farmer, with a comical look. “It seems but little more than as many months,” continued he, reflectively.

“Thank you, sir, for reminding me of the exact date,” replied the dame, boiling with increasing indignation; “I’ve no doubt but the reckoning is quite correct. Men begin to count the hours, from the moment they’re married, with a view of snow-balling the partners of their bosoms. There’s nothing pleases you more—nothing makes your lips crisper with fun—than flinging a round handful of years in the front teeth of your better halves—better, much better, heaven knows full well!”

“My dear,” expostulated the farmer, beginning to think he had gone a little too far without being aware of it, “I was only—”

“Oh, dear, no!” exclaimed the dame, with a chuckle, “you meant nothing. Men never do. They *only* do their best—or, as I should say, their worst—to make the

partners of their bosoms pray, morning, noon, and night, on their bended knees, that they had never been such blind moles as to consent to jump through life in sacks; for such may be called our condition, Mister Stockley—jumping through life in sacks. We're clogged up to our very chins, haven't the natural use of our legs or arms; and in my opinion—which, of course, goes for nothing, being a woman's—directly the conubial knot is tied—a proper name to call it—we should consider ourselves like those poor blacks who make our sugar—and I'm sure I never drop a bit in my tea but I think of 'em—as sold into slavery for the remainder of our natural lives.”

“ Well, dame,” returned the farmer, drily, “ if your complaint holds good as to the legs and arms, I think you'll be free to confess your *tongues* are not much more confined after marriage.”

“ Heaven be praised ! ” ejaculated she. “ No ; the lords of the creation—as you call

yourselves, but why, I never could make out—have not quite robbed us of the privilege of expressing our thoughts. We can still do that ; and I fervently hope,” continued she, turning her eyes to the ceiling above her head, “that the day is far distant before an act of parliament will be passed to prevent a woman from giving the world at large ‘a bit of her mind.’”

“Amen!” responded the farmer, “It would not be for the improvement of the world,” continued he, “that any such law should be made, I’m sure.”

This reply seemed to soften the crude asperity of Dame Stockley’s feelings, and something like a smile played about her lips as she resumed her work among the apple-blossom bows, festoons, and streamers. The storm was clearing up.

“I suppose,” observed the farmer, “that this May-day and holiday gear is intended for *the* occasion,” and he emphasised the article in his speech with particular stress.

“If it’s a matter, Mister Stockley, in which you can feel the most distant interest,” replied the dame, “I can inform you, sir, that your supposition, in this solitary instance, is quite correct.”

“Being so frequently out in my reckonings,” rejoined he, screwing his mouth into as grave a shape as it would bear, “I’m glad to find I am right for once, if it’s only by sheer accident.”

“Considering the manifold errors of your ways,” returned Dame Stockley, but she spoke more in sorrow than in anger, “it certainly is a cheering circumstance.”

“But what a consolation it is,” added he, in a good-natured, bantering tone—and he placed his broad hand lightly upon her shoulders—“that I’ve always somebody ready to set me straight! What a blessing it is in all respects, that I’m never in want of being reminded of every mistake and blunder of my eyes and limbs, thoughts and speech! What a comfort to know,

that if so be my feet wander the breadth of a hair from the line chalked out for their stepping, they'll be jerked in again with about the sharpest checkstring that was ever pulled upon a straying sinner."

"I am glad," said the dame, with a strong inclination to laugh heartily at this thrust at her rules of admonishment. "I'm really delighted—to use a strong expression—that you are so sensible of the blessings with which you are visited."

"Not like angels visits either," continued the farmer, "few and far between, but what may be called regular daily calls."

This was rather more than the dame's cachinnatory tendency could withstand, and yielding to the inclination, she buried her face between her hands, and broke out into a loud peal of laughter. The storm had entirely dispersed.

"That's right, dame," said he, applauding her on the shoulders. "There's nothing

better than the sunshine of a good temper. But I've brought ye some news."

"News," ejaculated the dame, bringing her mirth to an abrupt termination. "News! Don't waste a moment more," continued she, "tell me—tell me at once."

"There's not a single rood or perch of the estate lost," responded the farmer. "Every farm which was foreclosed, or pretended to be sold, was so manœuvred by lawyer Sharp, as to fall into his own possession, and turning out the tenants was only a dodge of his, to make it appear that the property had gone into the hands of strangers."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the dame, raising her hands. "Only to think I should live to hear such wonders!" and she lifted the corner of her apron to her eyes pathetically, as if the communication proved too much to receive with less composure.

"They are all to have their farms again,"

continued he, "at easy rents, on long leases. That is to say, all those that don't go quite mad with joy; for I just left a few at the Duck and Gridiron, on the high road to the county lunatic asylum."

"Well I never," ejaculated the dame, again directing her eyes to the ceiling above her cerebellum. "Did you ever?"

"Certainly not," returned the farmer; "nobody ever did!"

If the dame had not been more than ordinarily quick in the application of her handkerchief at this moment, two large tears would have rolled upon the apple blossom ribands, to the serious detriment of their brightness of hue and shade.

"It's many a long year," said she, "since I cried for joy."

"And yet," replied he, "how strange it is that a woman *will* cry, be she miserable, vexed, or happy. I never saw one but what was always ready with her salt an' water on the smallest notice."

“ Well, well ! ” rejoined the dame. “ We of the softer sex must be expected to be a little moist in our ways. But only to think that the Warrens will *be* the Warrens ! Isn’t it a noble thought for the mind to dwell upon ? For I ’m ready to admit— ” she hesitated as if the confession was nipped in the bud.

“ To admit what ? ” inquired the farmer, raising his eyebrows with the question.

“ That I ’m a sinful woman,” replied she, again applying the corner of her apron to her eyes ; “ a very sinful woman.”

“ In what respect ? ” rejoined he.

“ It will relieve my mind,” added the dame, with a heaving bosom, “ if I tell you, Harry, that although, at all times, I would have killed the partlet which roosts next the cock, the fattest duck, the plumpest turkey poult, or, indeed, done anything in my power to render one of the family the smallest service, I couldn’t help—the feeling oozed out of the tips of my fingers—losing a consider-

able deal of respect, or reverence, for the very Grange itself, when I knew the bums were inside its walls."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the farmer. "And how was that?"

"There's the riddle," replied she. "But so it was, and I could almost die with a broken heart at being so like a heathen."

"Humph!" rejoined farmer Stockley. "I fear sooty-skinned heathens are not more open to such a charge, than many of us lily-white Christians. We take off our hats to money," continued he; "but keep them on where money's wanted."

"It's too true," sobbed the dame, "much too true."

"Hah!" exclaimed the farmer, taking in a considerable stock of breath. "And let those who talk the loudest and longest of disinterested friendship, and all that fal-the-ral-tit, they'll be found among the first to run, like rats, from a falling house. The best of us," continued he, "as that sound old

pippin Luke Puffy says, are as difficult to be picked from their sayings, as the choicest half dozen of native oysters from a double barrel by their shells."

"Then you don't think the worse of me for what I've said," observed the dame, in a plaintive tone.

"The worse!" repeated he, snapping a finger and thumb like the crack of a whip.
"Not *I*."

CHAPTER XIV.

“ Yet shew some pity.”

LIKE a timid bird beneath its mother's wing, Maud sat nestling by her father's side in the chair, once so constantly occupied by her, and opposite was Sir Edward Warren, supposed to be deeply engaged in the close examination of the abstruse mysteries of a most extensive skin of parchment, which he held in such a way as to screen his face from Mr. Sharp's observation. The object for this concealment revealed itself in the soft and stolen glances which, from time to time, he darted over the edge of the document towards Maud, and as each met with a re-

turn of the like description, the telegraph of love was kept at work with considerable force and industry.

“Have you read the deed?” inquired Mr. Sharp, dropping a pen from between his fingers, as he pressed Maud closer to his breast.

“As much of it as I could possibly desire,” replied Sir Edward, with an effort to maintain a becoming seriousness.

“And you have no objections to raise?” rejoined the lawyer.

“Not one,” added Sir Edward. “It’s a most fortunate circumstance,” continued he, folding the deed and handing it to Mr. Sharp, “that I can conscientiously declare myself totally unacquainted with a single objectionable word, sentence, or construction, contained in the whole of this exceedingly voluminous document.”

“The settlement I think a fair one,” said Mr. Sharp. “The principal provisions—”

“Thank you, my dear sir,” interrupted

Sir Edward, "for the trouble you were about taking in their solution; but really my brain is so badly constituted for the comprehension of legal problems, that I much prefer leaving them as enigmas quite beyond my ken."

"May I ask," said Maud, in a hesitating tone, "what is intended to be given to Mister Racket?"

"All that in common justice belongs to him," replied her father. "I've been deeply engaged in the endeavour to find out what may fairly be considered his, and if an error arises," continued he, "from the complication of matters and accounts, it shall at least be on the side of generosity towards him."

"Spoken like my own dear father!" rejoined Maud, with fervour. "For all his faults, I could never be happy to think that he was wronged by us of a single shilling."

"Nor I, to the decimal part of a shilling," said Sir Edward. "Let him have principal

and interest of all monies borrowed by either my father or myself. We must be under no obligation to Mister Racket."

"Of the absolute amounts received," replied Mr. Sharp, "he shall have both what was borrowed, and the fair interest due upon the loans."

"To that he is entitled," observed Sir Edward.

"The law would not award it," responded the lawyer, smiling.

"No," said Sir Edward; "but the legal code may sometimes be greatly improved by the reflected light from honor and compassion. The strict letter of the law," continued he, "is nothing short of Shylock's bond."

"We will be more liberal than that famous Israelite," replied Mr. Sharp, "although I must be allowed to make the bargain."

"You doubt my capacity to treat with our friend Racket," returned Sir Edward, "And by my troth," continued he, "if the

past be any proof of my inability, the less I interfere in the arrangement the better."

"We seem to be precisely of the same opinion this morning," observed the lawyer, with a look of mingled affection and pride at his companions.

"It would have spared me many anxious years," replied Sir Edward, "had I sought always to agree with your opinions, instead of opposing them on every fitting opportunity."

"Tut, tut!" ejaculated Mister Sharp, "I was as much, if not a great deal more in the wrong than yourself. Tender twigs require tender hands. We may bend them with care in the direction required for them to twine and grow; but harsh usage snaps them. Like the majority of human errors," continued he, "I saw mine plainly when too late to be retrieved."

At this juncture a slight, very slight, knock was given at the office door, and immediately afterwards the beaming counten-

ance of Simon Slip presented itself. It is impossible to describe the glowing expression which lit up and illuminated Simon's entire features. The harvest moon was never brighter, and as he stood gently rubbing his hands together, dressed in a neat new suit of cloth and kerseymere, no elderly individual could be desired to present a more contented, respectable, or wholesome appearance.

"I believe, sir," stammered Simon, after a nervous survey of those before him—but his gaze rested longest upon Maud—"I believe, sir," repeated he, "that I received this note from you," and as he spoke, he produced a well-fingered piece of paper, as if it had been often read since its delivery.

"You must know my handwriting well by this time, Simon," replied Mr. Sharp, "and therefore can speak more positively than to your belief."

"Certainly, sir," rejoined Simon, looking at the note, "and I should therefore say

there can be no doubt about it, whatsoever."

"You can make a shrewd guess of the object I had in sending for you, I suppose?" observed the lawyer.

Simon coughed; brushed a piece of imaginary flue from the tip of his nose; but said nothing.

"Come," returned Mr. Sharp, "you were not wont, Simon, to be so dull. What, think you, is the cause of my desiring your presence here to-day?"

"To make me the happiest of men, sir," replied Simon, clasping his hands together, while tears coursed each other down his lined and furrowed cheeks. "To tell me what I don't deserve; that I may go back to my old stool, and there sit to the last day I can crawl upon it. That's the blessing, sir, I hope to receive at your hands."

"Think," rejoined Mr Sharp. "Is there nothing you would like better?"

"Nothing on this earth, sir," returned Simon.

“ But you are getting old,” added Maud, in her silvery voice, “ and may wish for ease instead of service.”

“ No, Miss,” said Simon, shaking his head. “ The service to which I’ve been used will be all the ease I require. Take me from that, and my comfort’s at an end.”

“ What creatures of rule and habit we become!” exclaimed Sir Edward. “ I can almost fancy a blind horse in a mill might prefer his daily work, to constant idleness in a pasture.”

“ That would entirely depend, in my opinion,” replied Mr. Sharp, laughing, “ upon a variety of contingencies. Supposing the horse to be well fed, not required to over grind himself, and treated with uniform kindness, a probable inference may be drawn, that he would prefer this state and condition to an arid field, being constantly exposed to wind and weather, school-boys’ brick-bats, and swarms of flies.”

“ A truly forensic answer,” said Sir Ed-

ward. "But in our discussion we are forgetting Simon."

"We will not trespass further upon Simon's time or patience," replied Mr. Sharp, good-humouredly. "I've no doubt but that he is most anxious to take possession of the stool, he speaks of with so much tenderness and attachment, and as it would be cruel in us to cause the smallest unnecessary delay, perhaps Simon, you'll install yourself at once, with any ceremony you may think proper to observe."

Simon Slip expressed his thanks more eloquently by looks than words, and was about backing himself out, when Maud came forward, and placing a small pocket book in his hand, said, "Accept of this from me, and let its contents be applied for the wants of increasing years."

"You're too kind to me, Miss," replied Simon, struggling with his feelings; "everybody's too kind to me. I don't know what I've done to deserve it, I'm sure."

“Continue, at least, in the same course,” rejoined his master, “and trust to the judgment of others for your deserts. The world in general,” continued he, “is not too liberal in awarding prizes for merit.”

CHAPTER XV.

“ 'Tis a cruelty
To load a falling man.”

WITHIN a short time the lawyer's features wore a very different expression, for he was now closeted with Jack Racket, who looked the very essence of the deepest dejection and despair. Like one at sea with a rebellious stomach, he appeared to have lost all relish for vitality, and rested in his seat with little more exuberance of spirits, than might be expected in a culprit undergoing the process of pinioning, as a preliminary to his speedy execution.

“ Never thought I should be sold such a

bargain as this, 'Torney," said he, in a mild and plaintive tone. "Had a different opinion of ye altogether."

"You 'll pardon my saying," replied Mr. Sharp, "that I much prefer the opinion you now hold of me, than the one which you so frequently expressed on former occasions."

"Ah," groaned Jack. "There 's no trusting anybody in this life! When an event looks like a booked certainty, and none but a fool would mind bettin' all he 'd got in the universal world, down to the buttons off his shirt, a double cross is set a-going, and pops Confidence and Co. clear in the hole. It makes a man," continued he, with a sigh which heaved his breast, "wish himself in heaven!"

A slight smile separated the lawyer's lips; but he maintained a strict silence while Jack continued his lamentation.

"Only to think," resumed he, "that I should be bowled out in this manner! At

Newmarket I 'm called Johnny Wideawake, or the downy cove what sees round the corners. They 'll take those names from me now, 'Torney. I shall never be looked upon as the downy cove what sees round the corners any more. It 's heart-breaking to think of though, considerin' the light in which I was held in the ring. Not a leg nor a tout, but what was ready to pick my information out of my teeth, and the first moment I opened my mouth, up would go the odds as if a prophet had dropped among 'em. But the game 's up now, and the caster 's out."

Jack pressed his hands over' his eyes, as if to hide the deep affliction with which his retrospective thoughts filled him, and, after a pause of short duration, continued to narrate his griefs and sorrows.

"For more years than I could count, if I was to use my fingers backwards and forwards for a week" said he, "I 've been expecting the day when I was to be so jolly rich, that I might look at money as so much water

to spill. It 's a hard case, 'Torney, when it seemed to have arrived, to find myself with scarcely a portrait of Majesty in gold, to spin in a game of pitch-an'-toss."

"The case is not so desperate as that," replied Mr. Sharp. "There is still something left for you."

"Something!" repeated Jack. "What a beggarly sound that has to everything. I once thought I was to have all, 'Torney, down to the last mag."

"As I once before observed, sir," said Mr. Sharp, "I wish no word of mine to add to your mortification; but let me ask who you could possibly expect to sympathize with you, in the disappointment of such hopes and anticipations?"

"Who?" returned Jack. "Why every man in the ring to be sure. I'd bet a hat-full of money to an insolvent's bit of stiff, there's not a ragged hanger-on to a training stable in all England, but what would feel downright grieved for me. I don't mean

to give offence," continued he, "particularly as what I 'm to get depends on your liberality, 'Torney; but a double cross isn't often set going. Sportin' men are not generally too full of confidence in each other; but a double cross is a shy trick and one which is seldom played."

"Your reproaches, Mister Racket," rejoined the lawyer, amused with the indirect and scarcely comprehensible terms in which they were couched, "fall with a light and harmless weight on me."

"Well!" said Jack, "some folks' backs are broad enough to carry their sins as if they were feather weights, and, perhaps, 'Torney, you may be one o' these remarkable strong men. But if *I* had circumvented a friend, as you have me, upon my soul, I shouldn't have strong expectations of dying with my shoes on!"

"Then what do you say in extenuation of *your* deeply laid plans for the ruin of him you professed to befriend?" asked Mr. Sharp.

"Oh!" replied Jack, "there the boot is on a totally different leg! A pigeon's a pigeon all the world over. I pluck, you pluck, they pluck; everybody plucks who can get a feather. But hawk doesn't eat hawk, does he? It's dreadful, 'Torney, when birds of a feather eat each other."

"But I am not desirous of being considered one of the hawk tribe," rejoined the lawyer, still humouring the 'revenge' which Jack flattered himself that he was taking.

"Well!" returned Jack, "I won't say you're exactly one of the hook'd bills; but a decoy duck never had a better painted plumage. I thought, 'Torney, you were pullin' stroke oar in the same boat with us, I did! I give you my sacred word of honor!"

"It can be no cause of regret on my part," observed Mr. Sharp, "that your thoughts, on such a subject, should not be supported by the realization of the fact."

"Certainly not, 'Torney," said Jack,

with a cunning leer. "When we palm a card, and thereby win the odd trick, the double and the rub, there 's no great occasion for us to weep for the friends we have sent to the pleasant village of Break-em-and-smash. Every Christian on his own prad, and the devil as the whipper-in, eh?"

Perhaps this query posed the lawyer, for he said nothing in reply.

"It 's a booked certainty," resumed Jack, with a view, perhaps, of making an impression upon the lawyer's fears, "that after this the Guv'nor will never sleep quiet in his grave. He 'll take to the habit of wandering by the light of the moon, as sure as we live, and it 's even bettin', which of the two he 'll make the ugliest faces at, the doer or the done. Only to think, too," continued he, "how he used to speak of your sooperior talents! I think I hear him now saying, 'Torney can trot out a man's donkey in a style which makes one feel he 's

making the most of the animal.' Ah Guv'nor—long in the head as he was in all respects—little suspected what a plant was being made upon him and his offspring."

"When you are disposed to conclude this harangue," said Mr. Sharp, "we will proceed to business."

"I shall wind up presently, 'Torney," returned Jack; "but it seems to give me ease to wag a little about my miseries. I don't suppose," continued he, in a piteous tone, "that they 'll quite break my heart. People often talk about broken hearts, but damn me, if they 're not a great deal more like pewter than crockery."

"Your machinations had well nigh broken more than one," observed the lawyer.

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed Jack, "you may bend 'em, but there 's no such thing as making 'em crack. However, we needn't talk of chipped and flaw'd hearts, as none of our acquaintance, 'Torney, are likely to

gladden their heirs and successors with a sudden death from the fracture. Can't suppose even," he continued, with a tone of derision, "that your little doll of a daughter feels much in the mopes at givin' me up, and making a draw of the match. Terrible part of the sell that was. Made up my mind to couple myself with the little filly, and a da-velish nice, sweet-going, high-steppin' pair we should have made. But oh! if it isn't enough to give one a fit of the uglies to know it was all a sham—a regular dead take in! Never shall I be called Johnny Wideawake again, or the downy cove what sees round the corners. It's all up with my patchwork!"

Extended as Jack's plaint had been, there was no disposition on Mr. Sharp's part to interrupt him, and he resolved to maintain a patient mood, and listen to the end.

"My wicket 's down," continued Jack, "and I shall never have another innings. In the great game which most of us play,

'Torney, once in our lives, if the stumps are lowered when winning or losing depends upon the stroke, a man may put his hands in his pockets and take his place on the shady side the way. He 's done, sir, done to a moral. Now, this is my hang-dog state 'and condition,' and *with* my hands in my pockets on the shady side the road, I 'm ready to hear all you 've to say, and as ready to take all I can get."

"That which I have to say, sir," replied the lawyer, "will occupy but a very short time, particularly as I do not intend making another remark on the conduct which I considered throughout both just and expedient to observe."

"The less said on that score," rejoined Jack, "the better."

"In this particular we are of the same opinion," returned Mr. Sharp, "although, probably, from opposite reasons. However," continued he, "to those points which can alone interest you now. It is the united

wish of my daughter and Sir Edward Warren, that all should be rendered to you which in common fairness can be considered the rightful property of your late father."

Jack gathered himself up in his chair, and began to assume a much more cheerful appearance.

"All, eh?" said he "come, that tinkles like the true music."

"But," resumed Mr. Sharp, "by far the greatest part of his fortune cannot be deemed to have properly and equitably belonged to him."

Jack's visage fell again below zero.

"Having used, however, my best endeavours," continued the lawyer, "to arrive at a fair conclusion upon this head, I still find there 's a handsome sum coming to you."

"Say it again," cried Jack, whirling his hat in the air. "Let me hear it once more, 'Torney. A handsome sum! I'll pepper every leg in the ring. Up an' down, round

we go. That 's your time o' day. Chink-wink 'em along."

"Out of this amount," said Mr. Sharp in the same measured and deliberate tone, "a deduction—"

"No, no," interrupted Jack, with his high-flown hopes suddenly breaking away like a kite's string. "Don't, don't talk of deductin' a farthing, 'Torney. I can't afford it; I can't upon my soul."

"A deduction," continued the lawyer, "must be made of three thousand pounds for your mother."

"She 's no right to it," replied Jack, "and never had."

"Her right, at least," rejoined Mr. Sharp, "is as good an one as your own."

"Well!" added Jack irritably. "It 's no use kicking against pitchforks. Let me know what I 'm to touch, and when. I 'm amazingly anxious to learn these two particulars, whenever there 's a chance of my touching Majesty's portraits in the good old metal,

which will pass a man through this world, whatever doubts the parsons may throw in as to its getting him through the next."

"Within a week from this time," said Mr. Sharp, and Jack listened with pricked ears, "I shall be prepared to hand you in money and securities, twenty three thousand pounds."

"How much in money—in the hard ringing mopuses, 'Torney?" asked Jack, as if at a sudden loss for breath.

"About half the amount," replied the lawyer.

"Split my windpipe," rejoined Jack, "but I wish it was more! What will you give me for the securities, 'Torney, and make the lump all in the genuine rowdy, eh?"

"Nothing," returned Mr. Sharp.

"Nothing!" repeated Jack, following the exclamation with a long shrill whistle.

"Then what are they worth?"

"All they represent," added the lawyer, "twenty shillings in the pound."

“And marketable at the price?” inquired Jack.

“At any moment,” was the reply.

“Those are your skins for me!” exclaimed Jack. “But you won’t touch ’em, eh? No matter. Heads up and tails down. That’s your time o’ day. Chink-wink ’em along!”

“I cannot but fear that any advice, I might offer you, would be thrown away, sir,” returned Mr. Sharp; “but if I might suggest the necessity of prudence and care—”

“Damn both!” interrupted Jack, rising from his chair with one of his swaggers of old. “Prudence and Care were never in my list of hounds, ’Torney. I hate the bitches with all my heart, and love the rattling, flying devils, Chance and Fortune, better than air and light and brandy water. Heads up and sterns down, away they go, mute from the very pace. Now with a flash, and then with a check, helter-skelter, in-an’-

out—that's your what's o'clock. Chink-wink 'em along!"

"I'll not occupy your time or attention," said the lawyer, "with another remark. We must meet again but once."

"Settling day, eh?" responded Jack. "Nothing could be more smiling to me, 'Torney, than a meeting of that kind. Shouldn't wonder but you'll see me all grins and gammon. Thought my cut o' the cake a shaving to what it is. All r-r-right. Might have been worse. Go it you paralytics. Not so lame, but I can hop!"

"There's nothing more to be discussed or spoken of, I believe," rejoined Mr. Sharp, in a way which plainly announced his desire for a speedy termination of the interview.

"Not that I know of," returned Jack. "Felt uncommon down upon my luck when we opened on the drag, 'Torney; but I'm now like an air balloon, all among the clouds and cherubs. It's amazingly odd how a few touches will varnish a picture. Couldn't

have supposed it possible. Shake up your lucky bag and winnow the blanks. That's your time o' day. Chink-wink 'em along!"

"At the same hour," said the lawyer, "and on this day week, meet me here."

"That I will, you may take your oath, 'Torney," replied Jack, "and in such fettle that I haven't been seen lately. There's no mistake about *me*," he continued, rolling his head from side to side. "I'll take the starch out o' some of the stiff backed uns yet. Yes, yes; the downy cove what sees round the corners isn't bowled out. There's a few symptoms of life in the flounder after all, and may be a little more than was expected in a flat fish. Flat but once though," continued he with a knowing look. "Never shall be caught again, 'Torney."

CHAPTER XVI.

“ This morning, like the spirit of a youth
That means to be of note, begins betimes.”

THE sunshine streamed through the painted window of the church, and caused the glowing colours to fall with luminous effect upon that lean and lank-jawed crone, so industriously engaged in sweeping each nook and corner of dust and cobweb. By way, it is supposed, of adding a little cheerfulness to her labour, she hummed aloud the hundredth psalm, occasionally breaking into the harmony by making a few observations to the particular object of her attention.

“ Ah!” ejaculated she, placing her arms akimbo, as she addressed an old banner which hung in tatters above her head, “ if I didn’t know you ’d fall all to pieces, I’d shake a new face on you this morning. It’s a wonder to me,” she continued, “ how parson will keep such an old rag to harbour dirt in; but the good man would be sorely vexed to see even a thread of ye touched.”

That, indeed, the good man would be; for the flag was once borne in the holy wars, by the Knight Templar now sleeping beneath that massive stone on which a figure, armed *cap-a-pie*, lies with uplifted hands. The inscription cut upon the tomb, recounting his prowess and deeds of arms, is now worn smooth by time, and scarcely an indented letter remains to tell of what was once the theme of troubadour’s song, and minstrel’s story.

Gaily the crone continued her work, and she swept the long rows of mouldy hatch-

ments suspended against the walls, and scaring an ancient family of bats from behind one of the largest of the escutcheons, sent them flitting on the wing up and down the aisle.

“ There’s parson again !” said she, resting on the handle of her broom, as she watched the bats whirling in circles about the roof, “ He wouldn’t have one o’ those flying mice killed for the brightest guinea that was ever coined, and yet what good they do I never could make out. No matter, let them go ;” and she renewed her chaunt and the brooming at the same moment with increased vigour.

The marble monuments on which were inscribed the virtues and charities of many, who,—if the knowledge extended to the dead, might have started with the praise so lavishly bestowed by a generous posterity—came in for their share of the dame’s handiwork, and the old church, in all respects, looked many shades brighter and

fresher, as she wound up her labours with the hallelujah chorus, and a general blessing upon mankind.

“God bless us all,” said she, “Amen ! It ’s a long time since you had such a cleaning, and I ’ve no doubt but it will be much longer before you get such another ; for my bones grow stiff, and parson ’s not hard upon the old. No, no, the good man ’s easy with all who want ease, and doesn’t fret about a little dust.”

The bells now broke forth in a merry peal, and each under each, the gladdening sounds were carried on the morning breeze and wafted through dell and dingle, copse and wold, to make light hearts still lighter with the music. Thomas Piper’s ready ear was among the first to catch the joyful notes, and as he leaned from the open casement of his dormitory, with his toilet as yet but partly completed, never did “content so absolute” shine more cloudlessly in the rubicund visage of any individual of three-

score and ten, and upwards, than in that of which he remained the undisputed possessor and proprietor.

“I’m a boy again,” said he, “a mere youth. I shall take to flying kites, bowling hoops, and playing at marbles. Those are the games for *me*, and anything stronger than milk and water and tea, I mustn’t think of. A thimbleful of the best gooseberry would make me see double, I *do* believe, and a draught from Toby Philpot stun my brain altogether. With these youthful tendencies,” continued he, “I must fall back upon sucking diet.”

Jovial Joe Beans was among the foremost to hearken with breathless interest to the swelling peal, and after having assured himself that it was not the mockery of the dream in which was strangely blended his daughter Sally in bridal array, mountains of white favours, Pug perched on the sails of his windmill, whirling round with frightful velocity, interminable ringing of bells out of

tune, and other unreal conceptions of an idle brain, he skipped with a single bound from between the clothes, and commenced a *pas de seul* to one of his liveliest whistling airs.

Miss Beans, too, was wide awake on the shortest notice; but the damsel did not evince any palpable gratification at what she heard. Indeed, if a license may be ceded to the historian in touching upon the sanctuary of Sally's bed-chamber, it may be recorded without fear of contradiction, that the twist and lines in her nasal organ, as it appeared in close conjunction with the pillow, looked more marked than usual. The offensive odour, perhaps, was unusually powerful this morning.

"Ring on," said the virgin, raising herself slightly on her elbows. "Ring on," repeated she. "Children and fools love a noise. They don't care what it's about, so long as there's the din and clatter. For

my part," and she spoke with a strong infusion of felwort, or some such bitter, in every word, "I hate what people call joyful sounds. Give *me* the quiet and respectable."

With the lark, Luke Puffy was astir, and as the bells smote his ear, he felt impelled to convey a faint notion of his extravagant delight by the performance of something which was, at least, unusual. For a pinch of seconds, he seemed at a loss to know what this something should be; but after a little cogitation, a bright spark of the god-like mind kindled an idea, and rushing impetuously into the kitchen of the Duck and Gridiron, he kissed the cook.

Dame Stockley was beside herself. She said so a dozen times before the tenors and double bob majors struck so pleasingly upon her tympanum, and it must be confessed that it required a cooler head than hers, not to feel giddy from the high pinnacle of de-

light on which she stood. By way of checking the exuberance of the dame's soaring spirits, the farmer deemed it advisable to assume a calm and collected demeanour, and he effected this with considerable difficulty. "Come, dame," said he, "you'll never hold out till night, if you're so fast thus early. Remember you are not so young ——"

"What! snow-balling the partner of your bosom with her age on such a day as this?" said she, reproachfully. "Fie, fie!"

"I didn't mean ——"

"Of course not," interrupted the dame. "Men never do. I told you so, Harry, once before, you'll recollect. But we must have no differences to day," continued she, and giving him a light, playful slap on the cheek, she hurried away to try the effect of the apple-blossom ribands for the thirteenth time that morning.

It was yet early; but the village was as

busy as a swarm of ants at noontide; for nothing could exceed the general interest taken in the event which this happiest of happy days was to witness—the union of Maud Sharp and Sir Edward Warren. Before the sun was up, and while the mist still hung thickly in the valley, and rolled along the hill-side in drifting clouds, many a maiden might be seen gathering flowers from bed, bank, and bower, to strew in the path of the bride. Some were occupied in making wreaths and garlands from the stores which they had already made, and all were bent on rendering their meed of homage.

Long before the hour appointed for the ceremony to take place, crowds streamed by every highway and byeway towards the church. In kirtles sheen and holiday gear the throng collected about the old lych-gate, and with faces as bright as the sky above them, exchanged hearty greetings.

“’Tis a day, neighbours,” said an old

woman, leaning heavily with her palsied hands crossed upon a crutch stick—it was her a little older grown who spoke so eloquently at Rose Warren’s funeral—“ ’Tis a day, neighbours, we could never hope to see; but sorrow’s cloud often breaks when at the darkest. Bide but our time with patience, and He who metes out our griefs and joys, will weigh them with a hand of mercy.”

Brightly the sun shone, and gaily the bells pealed forth, and flowers were scattered in her path, as Maud, closely veiled and leaning on her father’s arm, trod with a modest trembling gait towards the altar, and there, amid smiles and blessings, plighted her troth to him, whose love was fully equalled by her own.

“May God’s blessing rest on thee and thine, lady!” said a voice, in a clear and soft whisper. “May it be His will and pleasure to turn from thee all harm and danger. In the hour of need may thy call

be hearkened to. May the wings of angels shield thee, as the wings of the bird covereth her brood. And when it pleases Him to take thee to Himself, may the prayers of the good and the penitent be mingled with their tears."

CHAPTER XVII.

“ With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come ;
And let my liver rather heat with wine,
Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster ?
Sleep when he walks ? and creep into the jaundice
By being peevish ? ”

THERE was joy in the Grange. The sounds of mirth echoed from the foundation to the roof, and were thrown back from each beam and rafter. Through many a long deserted room, the festive clamour rose and swelled, and died away, like fitful gusts of the passing wind. There was joy in the Grange. Within its old walls a happier throng was never assembled. No,

not when belted Knight and steel-capped Esquire quaffed the loving cup at Christmas revel. Dance succeeded dance, song, jest, and story, and yet the round of pleasure was maintained with no lack of freshness.

“It is a religious truth, ma’am,” observed Tom Piper to Dame Stockley, at the termination of his share in the performance of one of the most extraordinary reels that was ever witnessed by the oldest inhabitant of the village—for that the oldest inhabitant was present is beyond all shadow of doubt, as old Tom insisted upon a procession of wheelbarrows for those, who were unable to walk on crutches—“It is a religious truth, ma’am,” repeated he, “that I feel exactly as you look.”

“As I look,” said the dame, “as I look, Mister Piper?” and the apple-blossom ribands shook as if a zephyr’s breath had ruffled them.

“Grown young again, ma’am, is what I mean,” rejoined he, with the gallantry of

youthful days; for notwithstanding his single state and condition, old Tom had been a great admirer of the gentler sex.

"Really, Mister Piper," returned the dame, casting her eyes modestly upon the polished steel buckle of her shoe, "one feels at a loss for words."

"At a loss for words?" interrupted a voice, and there stood the farmer with one of his broadest of broad grins dividing his cheeks. "Let me hope," continued he, "that nothing serious has happened—no great accident."

"Whatever remarks you may think proper to make when at home, Harry," rejoined the dame, closing her eyelids, and looking the veriest martyr to marital despotism; "let, at least, the smallest taste in life of decency check and controul them when exposed to the eyes of the world. The eyes of the world," continued she, "often wear spectacles, which bring things to view much further off than some folks wot of, and it's

not an unusual circumstance for small observations and specks of conduct to be greatly magnified by these same spectacles. Wise, therefore, is the man," and she raised a finger to rivet the attention of her hearers, "who can unbutton his waistcoat and say, here 's a bosom in which no secrets are laid up."

"Solomon, ma'am," returned old Tom, "would be a chicken to him. Oh! what would I give," and he smote his breast with anything but a tender hand, "if there were no secrets a-grating and chinkling here!"

"Perhaps, Mister Piper," added the dame, with an itching ear to Tom's confession, "it might relieve your mind to give them—"

"Went," added the well-known voice of Jovial Joe. "There 's nothing like went," and off the miller whisked in a country dance to as merry a tune as was ever scraped from cat-gut.

That universal genius, Frank Martin,

essayed the musician's duties, and as he sat in a chair, perched on the end of the long table, blackened by time, and the flagons of ale which had floated upon its surface in many a carousal of the olden time, the notes flew from the strings as if from an inspired bow. Up and down, round and round, the crowd whirled to the strain, and quick as was the measure, hearts and heels accompanied it.

It cannot be affirmed that Luke Puffy's figure was well adapted to thread the mazy dance; but what he lacked in skill, he made up for in force. As a practical illustration of the weakest going to the wall, he occasionally came in collision with considerably more fragile forms than his own, and the unexceptionable result was, that the landlord maintained his ground, while the lighter of metal were sent several degrees out of their latitude. It all added to the fun, however, and Luke, finding his blunders popular, at length considered it part of his business, to send

a few couples, from time to time, staggering against each other like so many falling skittles.

Among the spectators who had arranged themselves at the farthest end of the hall, was Simon Slip, and, although his limbs were much too cramped with age, and constant sitting on his favourite office stool, to foot it deftly in Sir Roger de Coverley, the old clerk's cheeks were tinged with the warmth of pleasure glowing in his breast, and his eyes sparkled with the fire of earlier days. Not one of the merriest was happier than Simon, and he sat snapping his fingers to the blithesome tune by way of a castanet accompaniment.

In a snug corner, slightly removed from the rest, Pug had ensconced himself, and it was remarked, both at the time and afterwards, that the principal delight which he appeared to derive from the entertainment, was the concussion of bodies occasioned by Luke Puffy.

"At 'em again!" cried he, shewing his double row of even white teeth, "at 'em again!" and then his laugh rolled along the arched roof, and rose above the general din, with the most striking effect.

"You 've a palate for mischief even here?" observed Robin, approaching him.

"Aye," replied Pug, "nothing suits me better. As the wind blows so the rush goes."

"Comes natural to ye, eh?" rejoined the mole-catcher.

"As the cuckoo to suck eggs," returned Pug.

"But you'll not play off any of your tricks to night?" added Robin.

"No," said Pug, with a grin. "I thought of winding up the evening with the turnip skeleton head which, you'll remember, scared Mister Puffy out of his scanty allowance of wits on one occasion; but I'll put off the second appearance of that ghost for darker nights, and a more fitting occasion."

Among the steps of old Tom Piper's ladder

of ambition, was a desire to be deemed a matchless maker of that odoriferous mixture known by the name of punch. He believed, with justifiable reasoning, that constant practice, and a long experience, should operate as the most successful of teachers, and in the modest confidence of his own natural abilities, he entertained the honest opinion, that within the belt of our county, there was not a rival to him in the art.

Wide and deep was the bowl in which old Tom now commenced his delicate task of blending extreme opposites, and making sweets and acids mingle with such a nicety of proportions, that not a drop or a squeeze left a twang on the palate indicative of priority. To the olfactory nerves, a grateful steam now curled upwards, sending forth a rich incense, and causing Tom's nasal organ to twitch with sensible delight.

"It will do," said he, bending over the bowl and taking in a long drawn breath, "it will do to a stir," and then, as if to make as

surance doubly sure, he ladled out a cup, and fathomed its depth with unqualified satisfaction.

Rows upon rows, and dozens of solid squares of cups, were charged to the order of Tom Piper, and then, taking advantage of a lull in the boisterous mirth presiding, he mounted the board, as a temporary rostrum, and thus delivered himself.

"It was one of the ancients, a Mister Cicero, I think, who let fall such sweet words from his tongue, that the wild bees clustered about his lips for the honey. On this particular occasion, I must say, that I feel a little envious of Mister Cicero's gift of the gab; for nothing can be more certain, that he never had a finer opportunity for throwing off his poetry than I now possess, and as the finish will prove, not a nincompoop born could make much less of it. In part, however, you must take the will for the deed, and be satisfied with what I would do if I could."

"Hear, hear," cried Frank Martin, "a better opening couldn't be."

“There’s no occasion,” resumed Tom, “for me to remind you of the cause which brought us here. It is cut too deeply in our memories for a life time to wear out, and we shall ever turn to this day as one marked with the whitest stone. For aught we can tell,” and the old man’s face became burnished with the thought, “there may be another Master Ned for me to spoil, for christenings not unusually follow in the line of weddings; but this has rather to do with the future than the present, and I must confine myself to things that are.”

“And remarkably pleasant we find ’em, sir,” observed the landlord of the Duck and Gridiron. “I’m speaking for myself and this honourable company.”

“If I thought otherwise, Luke,” rejoined Mr. Piper, “a considerable deal of the shine would be taken off my plumage, I can assure you. However,” continued he, “I shall now proceed to wind up the short thread of my remarks, by asking ye to join

me in a toast, and since toasts were first drunk—and which are supposed to have been commenced at a very early part of the history of England—not one, in my belief, was ever drained with a heartier spirit than that will be, which I am on the point of giving.”

“It does not require a feel-osopher,” said Luke Puffy, with a sage nod of the head, “to know what’s coming.”

“Lads and lasses,” cried old Tom.

“Raise your glasses,” poetically responded the landlord of the Duck and Gridiron.

“We’ll drink,” continued Mr. Piper, amidst an unbroken silence, “to the health, long life, and happiness of Lady and Sir Edward Warren. May the sun of prosperity shine for ever on the roof which shelters them, and showers of blessings be poured on them and theirs, as free and fast as summer rains from heaven!”

A simultaneous cheer broke from every tongue. Again and again it rose, and

was borne far and wide, through the night's misty veil, starting many a pigeon from her roost, and making sleepy rooks caw drowsily to each other.

Hours rolled on, and still they danced, and still they sung, until a golden beam of morning light wreathing itself through the latticed casement, warned them that it was time to cease their revelling.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ But speak you on ;
You look as you had something more to say.”

NOTWITHSTANDING his boasted acuteness of vision, “ the downy cove what could see round the corners,” found them, occasionally, at such acute angles, that he met with many severe collisions in his endeavours to turn them with less judgment than speed. But in the long run, nothing could beat Jack Racket. At least, so he thought, and so he said, and “ all in the ring,” from horse-racing to cribbage, he tried with varied success, until an unlucky certainty, which was to make good all repairs in the dilapidations of his crumb-

ling fortune, left him without a shilling, or the credit for a glass of brandy-and-water. It was an awkward position for the downy cove, and he felt it with a sensitiveness which may be "far more easily conceived than described." The hardness of his case was the constant subject of his discourse, and he daily and hourly expatiated on the outrageous knocks which, at length, had earthed such sky-scraping hopes and expectations.

"To think that *I* should come to be poverty-stricken and parish-damn'd," soliloquized he, examining the soles of his top boots, which were threatening to part company with the upper leather. "Isn't it dreadful that a sportin' gent like me—one who can palm a card; throw a nick to every main; run, jump, ride, drive, shoot, and swim; play billiards, pool, and racket; blow the key bugle, and eat sugar'd oysters—should be dropped in the hole in this style? It only shews," continued he, with a whine and snuffle, "what it is to be too clever."

If I wasn't up to every move and dodge, a flat or two, now and then, might still be caught ; but they all head short back from *me*, like minnows from a pike," and then Jack sighed as if his heart was sore and sad.

From running to seed, he gradually ripened to the dry and husky pod, and in a battered hat which he still wore so as to cover but one side of his head, and ventilating garments, he hung about training stables to gather information in the capacity of "a Tout," and was well known at Newmarket for many seasons, as "the Greek out of luck." From his well known haunts, however, he was, at length missed, and the low tavern which he nightly visited, with the few shillings he either begged or borrowed, no longer echoed with his drunken roar and ribald jest. Few were the inquiries made concerning him, and like generations of much wiser and better men, Jack Racket, out of sight, soon became out of mind.

On the sea shore and close to where the

wild waves washed the beach, a pale-faced, attenuated form laid stretched in the sunshine, industriously shaking a couple of bright pebbles in the palm of his dexter hand, and every now and then, dropping them from it with eager and anxious looks. Close by his side, an old woman sat watching his movements, with an expression of deep sorrow rooted in her features, and as the wind swept his garments from his breast, she was always ready to draw them together closely, with a tender and gentle hand.

“Seven,” cried he, with a flushed cheek and flashing eye, “seven ’s the main!”

As the pebbles were jerked from his fingers a shade of sadness passed over his wan face, and in the tone of peevish childhood, he ejaculated, “Deuce ace. Out. Aye, it ’s ever out with me. I never win. I never win,” and he staggered to his feet, murmuring that “he never won; never.”

Without making any reply, his companion followed and, drawing an arm through hers,

supported him towards a neat adjacent cottage, far removed from any other habitation. And here Jack Racket, in harmless imbecility, passed the remainder of his mispent life, forgetful of the world, and by the world forgotten. She who cared for him, she who waited on him throughout the long night and weary day, and bore with silent patience the babbling discontent of the poor idiot, was one whose mother's feelings were awakened by nature's call, and who now tended her child with a parent's watchful care.

As may be supposed, Meteor, the flea-bitten grey, did not improve in his paces with succeeding years; albeit Joseph Beans maintained there was no falling off in them, and if the criticising eye of any keen observer, like Luke Puffy's for instance, discovered a suspicious stiffness in his action, the miller began to talk of the effects of training, strong work, and general preparations for Tare Down races next season. But it was always "next season," and as

“ To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty space from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,”

so Meteor's season was procrastinated, until there appeared a strong probability of the last syllable of recorded time being booked, before he again was brought to the post. For his owner was much too considerate to urge the “Flash of Lightning” beyond his own notions of accomplishing a certain space within a certain time, and the twain, as in days of yore, might be seen jogging along the highways and byeways of our county, holding familiar discourse, and continuing to the final stage on the road of life, the best of good old friends.

The task would be a far more agreeable one, if it could be written, without infringing on the golden rule of strict veracity, that Miss Beans's temper improved, like full-bodied wine, with age. But, “as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on,” Sally's palate for lecturing her parent, on

his manifold sins and transgressions, seemed to obtain a keener edge with revolving seasons. The offensive smell, too, was not a tittle less powerful, if the curl in her nose could be relied on as an infallible index, and so strong became her opposition to all matrimonial speculations, that she could scarcely place sufficient restraint upon the impulse to forbid the banns of all such couples, whose intentions were publicly notified in her presence. At such times and seasons, poor Joe's "reverse" ran imminent risk of thrusts from pin or needle; but be it recorded to her praise, she never fleshed the point of either, and unconscious of the threatened danger, the miller smoked his pipe, or dozed, in fancied security from all impending harm. In despair, perhaps, of becoming a bride, after the unsuccessful attempt at elopement with "Theophilus," Miss Beans sunk into the confirmed virgin of an uncertain date, and turned her attention to the increase of her poultry savings,

and general domestic arrangements. From the total absence of the opportunity, she never blamed him; but had the deceiver Pug crossed her path when a broom, or some such stout domestic instrument was in her clutch, it is far from being particularly problematical, whether she would not have wreaked dire vengeance upon his head, through the medium of the handle. With an eye—and he possessed one capable of sweeping the boundaries of a parish—to self-preservation, Pug exercised great caution in his strayings and wanderings, and kept a vigilant look out for Sally's whereabouts. Maintaining this caution as a daily rule without the slightest relaxation, there is no reason to suppose that he ever was surprised into a meeting, and thus a firm resolve kept those asunder, whom destiny appeared on the eve of joining irrevocably together.

Like the grey owl, whose retreat was not far removed from his own, Pug continued

to inhabit the hollow pollard tree, and with Nip and the jackdaw as companions, passed his time in a way best suited to his inclination. Instead of carrying out his threats of exterminating hares and foxes, he acted the part of their careful protector, and many a litter of pugnacious cubs has fought for the dainty rat and rabbit, provided by his catering. His mischief-loving propensity, however, still continued, and the sly tricks, laid to the charge of wind and weather, hedgehog, stoat, and weasel, truant school-boys, and other innocent victims to unjust censure, might be traced to him. Not that he escaped such accusations altogether; but in so far as getting more than were his due, he frequently met with justice strongly seasoned with mercy, by having the fardel of his sins shared among the many when it properly belonged to his own back.

With the comparative anatomy of grey-hounds, and other long-headed dogs, Robin the mole-catcher grew more cunning as he

grew older, and reports were rife that his operations in snaring and netting, became less confined in his latter years to larks, linnets, and other small game, than to the taking of a larger kind. These imputations upon his fair fame were never thoroughly sifted and winnowed; but there is some reason to think—as that which everybody says must be true, has been a standing axiom of long duration—Robin was not so guiltless of them as he wished to be believed.

“It’s hard, very hard,” observed he, peering under his shaggy brows, as he stood before the opening of Pug’s domain, “that an old man, like me, should have his name coupled with poaching.”

“Stony hard,” replied Pug, stirring up a cauldron of soup. “Folks must have flinty hearts in this neighbourhood, to speak of such a cripple in the way they do. How’s your rheumatiz?”

“Sorely, lad, sorely,” rejoined the mole-

catcher, drawing a hand across his loins with a groan.

"Can't stir a foot in the dew or the dark now, I suppose?" returned Pug, giving to view the entire set of his teeth.

"Eh?" shortly ejaculated Robin.

"Ah!" sighed Pug, shaking his head, "people get deaf and lame, and blind in their old age. More's the pity; more's the pity!" and he stirred the cauldron quickly.

"What's that broth made of?" inquired the mole-catcher, winding the fragrant steam as it was wafted to his nostrils.

"Sawdust," replied Pug. "A sort of carpenter's soup made from chips and sawdust."

"If my nose don't deceive me—"

"It's similar stuff you made your last stew of," added Pug. "Your nose," continued he with a grin, "is better than your ears, sir."

It was a bolt shot true to the mark; but Robin bore the shaft of sarcasm levelled at

him without much flinching, and calling Trump, turned upon his heel, and quitted the spot in silence.

“Take amazing care o’ yourself,” shouted Pug. “The dew and the dark are always bad for the rheumatiz.”

The genius of Frank Martin continued to reign paramount, and in all the diversity of his professions, arts, and manufactures, insured the greatest satisfaction from his supporters and admirers.

With pristine freshness, which nothing short of the spring-cabbage greenness of age could have achieved, the landlord of the Duck and Gridiron maintained the popularity belonging to that renowned *hostelrie* undiminished. In accordance with the announcement at the foot of the sign—representing a gigantic aquatic bird in a bright scarlet plumage, undergoing the culinary process of grilling over a yellow fire of intense fierceness—there was always “good entertainment for man and beast.”

The larder and cellar presented a stock from which the most fastidious of tastes might always make a selection, and better provender, Luke defied to be found in loft, bin, or manger.

As heretofore, the boon companions met at certain intervals to test the quality of Luke's stores, and notwithstanding there seemed to be a great monotony in the proceedings, both generally and collectively, none of the allurements were lost from the frequent repetitions. The cozy seats in the screen round the hearth, were occupied with the same methodical arrangement, and the martial portrait of the host continued to look from his elevated position on the jovial crew below, smiling like a hero when the fight was done.

The stool whereon poor Simon Slip had spent the greatest part of his simple and inoffensive life, was discovered, one morning, untenanted, although the hour had long since passed when it was his wont to occupy

it, with the regularity of the hand pointing on the dial. That night which cometh to all, had set upon him. His work was done. Alone he lived, and alone he died, and yet there were many who mourned for Simon, and long cherished him in their memories, as a gentle-natured, kind, and good old man.

Of his temporary successor, Timothy Tubbs, no authentic account can be rendered. As a member of the extensive family of Loose Fish, conjectures might easily be raised as to the probable termination of his career, but these may as well be left to the fertile imagination of the reader. Whether he "quitted his country for his country's good," or remained in it greatly to the opposite, cannot be stated with any degree of certainty ; for the veil of obscurity is closely drawn in all that relates to the history and adventures of Timothy Tubbs.

They had climbed the hill together, and were now descending it, hand in hand, with-

out, scarcely, being conscious of the decline, although dame Stockley frequently gave the farmer a bit of her mind, concerning the propriety of increasing years bringing with them a corresponding steadiness of habits. An extra half hour at the Market dinner was sure to produce a hint upon this subject, and a smell of tobacco invariably set the dame coughing till she was black in the face. There was no getting over the irritating effects of tobacco. It was not a trifle that should force a word of complaint from her lips. No. But when it came to throttling the partner of your bosom, *that* was a pretty pass! She wondered, for her part, how men could so far forget themselves, as to make smoky chimnies of their throats. Talk of onions! What were onions compared to pipes? And yet she could not eat half a dozen spring onions with her cheese—of which she was extremely partial—without being reminded of the circumstance. But the Lords of the creation might smoke their

pipes, and make their breath smell nastier than it was possible to say what, while the unhappy sharers of their bed and board, had not liberty sufficient to nibble a spring onion! It was a state of things considerably beyond the reach of *her* understanding; but so it *was*, and she supposed there was a strong likelihood of a continuance of it, world without end. The Lords of the creation had got the upper hand—what might be called the driving box—and she could see no glimmer of hope through the closed shutters of ignorance and prejudice, to expect an alteration for the better. As far, indeed, as human foresight went, there appeared good reasons to fear, by judging *of* the future *by* the present, that in the event of any change, it would be for the worse, and consequently she felt a Christian resignation in the faith, that things were some shades less black, than possibly they might become.

All these domestic homilies, however, the

farmer bore with exemplary fortitude and patience, and in no way added to, or carved the wrinkles deeper, which began to shew themselves in the first sneaping frosts of age. He still bestrode the perverse Buttercup, and often joined the meet, just to see the hounds throw off; and a story is yet rife of their having gone just to witness the last meet of the season on a market-day, when the farmer had the good fortune to tally the fox away, as he broke just under his nose. A bunch of hounds was close to his tag, and the farmer, rising in his stirrups, with his broad brimmed hat high in the air, made the intelligence known throughout several surrounding parishes, that there was not the slightest mistake concerning "Gone awa—a—a—ay!"

Now to persuade Buttercup—for there was less possibility of exercising force with the cob than ever, as he deliberately laid down whenever spur and whip were applied—to canter to the first hedgerow, just

to see them hold it over the next fallow, was not a task of great difficulty. The farmer's eyes dilated as he saw the hounds pick the scent through, and notwithstanding the dust flew in the wind, they carried a head, and bursting through the opposite fence, swept along like racing greyhounds from the slips.

"The fallows fly," observed farmer Stockley, leaning forwards in his saddle, as Buttercup carried him nobly through a gap, "and they can never last the pace over the hill. We'll just see what they'll do with him across Lot's bottom."

Down a winding lane, splashing through a ford, and up a steep slope, which proved Buttercup's wind to be in a sound and healthy state, the cob carried his master with a freedom of inclination, and a lightness of foot scarcely to be credited.

"We're with them again," remarked the farmer exultingly, as he saw the hounds puzzled by a flock of sheep running before

them ; but as Sir Edward came up with the body of the pack, and made a judicious forward cast, they hit off the scent again, and throwing up their heads, swept along at a pace far too good for Buttercup's best to live with them.

“ His point 's Billesdon gorse,” said farmer Stockley, reflectively. “ We might as well just view 'em over the wold,” and as the cob seemed to agree in this opinion to the letter, away they went for a short cut of four miles to Billesdon gorse, where they arrived just in the nick of time, to view the fox over the down, and dip his nose into the cover.

“ Tally-ho ! ” hallooed the farmer, at the strained pitch of his voice. “ Tally-ho ! Come along my darlings,” continued he, as the hounds now appeared on the line, in as close and level a body, as a pack of cards in a dealer's hand.

In Billesdon gorse, Reynard found but little pause for refreshing his impaired

powers of wind and limb, and quickly made his appearance on the opposite side from which he entered, with his tongue hanging from his jaws, and his brush dragging on the ground.

“There’s not five minutes life in ye!” shouted the farmer, “perhaps not half. We’ll just see if we can’t make one at the finish,” and sharing the inspiration of his rider, Buttercup put his fleetest leg foremost, and went as straight to hounds, as an entire want of fences, at this luckiest of junctures, permitted him.

“From scent to view they run him now, in vain
 fleet Reynard flies,
The ringing pack have doomed his death, he struggles,
 but he dies;
And at the finish who was there? why he who at the
 burst,
Led the boldest and the best, in the foremost flight
 was first.”

“Who-whoop!” hallooed farmer Stockley, cracking his heavy double thong, as he

snatched the victim from the fangs of his enemies. "Who-whoop!" and never did a sportsman's heart burn with greater rapture than his, when he found himself *just* first at the finish.

Returning homewards he met Joseph Beans on Meteor, and believing, in the simplicity of the miller's heart, that he should now have the earliest information concerning the price of wheat, oats, peas, and barley, he asked the question as to the state of their being up or down.

"Damn your barley!" ejaculated the farmer, and producing a long, white, tagged brush, as thick as his arm, he waved it in triumph over Buttercup's ears. "Look at this," continued he, "look at this."

Nothing more remains to be told of the farmer, dame Stockley, or Buttercup, and each and all may be dismissed with the comfortable assurance that their end was peace.

The sunny spot in the churchyard was

often visited. When no one was near, and in the soft twilight of a summer's eve, when the thickening shades of evening fell around, and the wind whispered through the trees, a mother knelt by the daisy-speckled mound, and prayed to meet her in heaven who slept beneath. This was her daily prayer, and at the close of a few years, another daisy-speckled grave might be seen, side by side with Rose Warren's, and here together they were joined in death, who, in life, had been inseparable.

Opposite a cottage door, and at the entrance of a noble avenue of lime trees, an old man sat with his face upturned to the clear and star-studded vault above. The breeze fanned his ruddy cheek freshly, and ruffled the few remaining locks upon his brow. It was Tom Piper, indulging in a reverie, described by himself as a-thinking. From the smile, however, which played upon his lips, it appeared to be anything but an unpleasant subject which occupied his

thoughts, and as he turned over the leaves of the past, he had the great satisfaction of finding the present, by comparison, of a far more desirable complexion.

“We should never despair,” said he, addressing Toby Philpot, who stood conveniently within reach, crowned with a snowy diadem, and grinning, as usual, at his own old joke. “We should never despair, my jolly companion, should we?”

If a decided negative was ever expressed by Toby Philpot, a truly unequivocal one was given on this occasion. Despair! He, Toby Philpot, despair! Such a poor, thin, watery feeling, could never be held within a brown jug like him, and he seemed to challenge the fact, as Mr. Piper took a liberal half of what he now contained.

“The ups and downs of this life,” continued Tom, with a smack of his lips, which closely resembled the crack of a well-handled whip, “are of that see-saw kind, that no man can say how long he’ll be pot, or how

soon he'll become pint in the world's measure of opinion. This can't be too soon taught to the bumptious, and many a lesson's taken longer time to learn with much less profit, than this which should be got with our hornbooks:—the pot of success, frothed with ambition, often sinks into the pint of flat, stale, and whistle-belly vengeance! But then on the other hand," continued Thomas Piper, "in the opposite corner, so to speak, we should not droop our heads and our hearts in the day of trouble, and fancy the clouds are never to break any more. Nothing lasts with us poor worms of mortals; neither our pleasures nor our griefs, and that man's a dunghill bred un, who, when sorrow comes tapping at his door, throws himself on his back, and won't even crow. It isn't natural to sing a lively song when we're being pricked; but as in the time of prosperity we shouldn't ride too short in our stirrups; neither in the season of adversity should we be too much cast on the crupper."

While he was speaking, a light footstep fell on his ear, and scarcely was the concluding sentence of the healthy axiom delivered, when a fair-haired child ran laughing towards him, and climbing upon his knees, twined his arms around his neck.

"Master Ned," said old Tom, with great gravity, as he nestled the boy fondly to him, "I fear you 've bolted, sir. I suspect, sir, you are a young runaway."

"I left them all, Tom, to come to you," replied the child. "I love you so, Tom," continued he, placing his soft peach-like cheek against Mr. Piper's. "Grandpa said I must stay with him; but he can't run, Tom, and I can."

"You 'll excuse me, sir," rejoined Thomas Piper, "you'll excuse me, Master Ned; but I'll thank you to return to the place from whence you came with all convenient despatch."

"No, no," returned the boy. "You mustn't tell me to go away, Tom, and I won't go if you do."

“There we are again!” ejaculated Mr. Piper. “I’m at the same old game of spoiling the family branch. Where can I expect to go to?” and he raised his eyes with a hopeless expression to the clear spangled sky above him, and shook his head despondingly.

At this moment he became conscious that he was being subjected to the silent scrutiny of Sir Edward and Lady Warren, who supported lawyer Sharp between them in a way which shewed that the assertion of Master Ned, concerning his grandfather’s impaired powers of pedestrianism, was in strict accordance with the fact.

“I thought, Tom,” said his master, smiling, “that there was a vow registered against the indulgence of Master Ned.”

“Ah, sir!” exclaimed Thomas Piper, with a sigh, “our resolutions and performances are quite different pippins. This was proved in the apple case of our common mother, Eve, and it’s only to be tempted with what

we most like, to fall, as she did, flat as a pancake."

"It 's time for bed," observed Lady Warren, taking hold of the child, and gently drawing him from Tom's close embrace.

"I won't go," shouted the boy, struggling to remain. "I won't go," repeated he. "Let me alone."

"But you 'll come with me," rejoined grandfather Sharp, coaxingly.

"No," returned the child. "I love to be with old Tom best."

"I must teach you, sir," returned Mr. Piper, with much reluctance, "*not* to love to be with old Tom best. It behoves you, Master Ned, to honour your father and mother that your days may be long in the land; and as a servant of the family, I 'm not going to stand by and see you neglect your catechism without a mild reproof on my part. You 've heard it 's time to go to bed," continued he, gravely, "and consequently to bed you 'll go."

Without further opposition, Master Ned yielded to the argument, and was carried towards the Grange, with no further evidence of dissatisfaction at the proceeding than a pair of red pouting lips.

In his resistless flight, Time has produced many changes in our county ; but while English hearts and manners may be found—

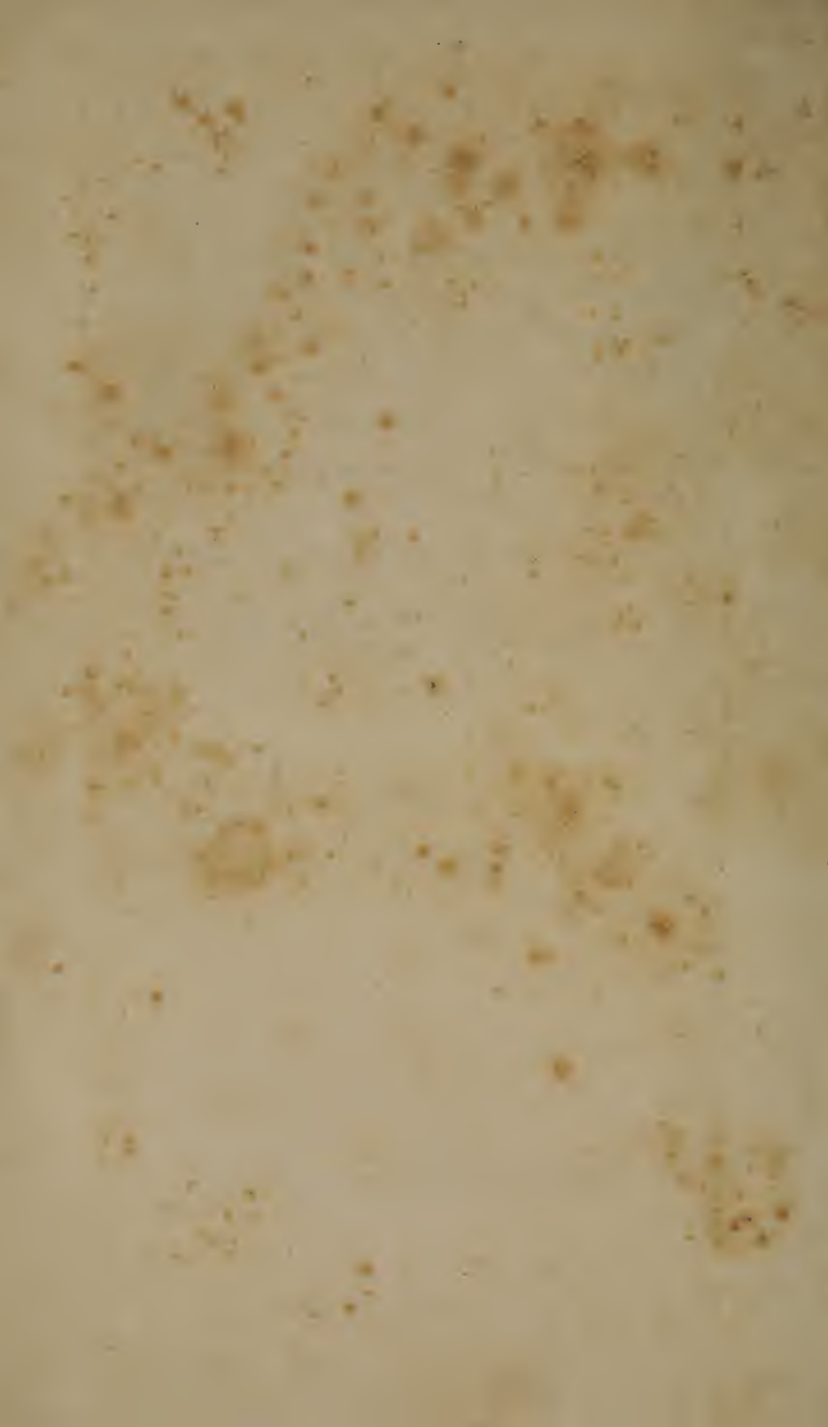
“Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.”

FINIS.

LONDON :

Myers and Co., Printers, 37, King-street, Covent Garden.







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